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Adventure

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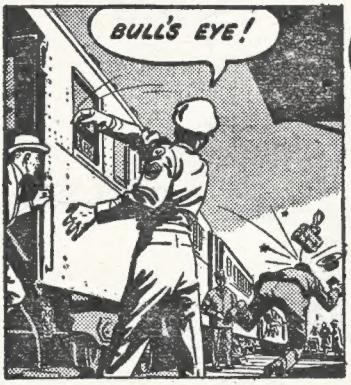

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I SURE DO. WE PLAYED FOOTBALL TOGETHER
HE'S CERTAINLY HANDSOME

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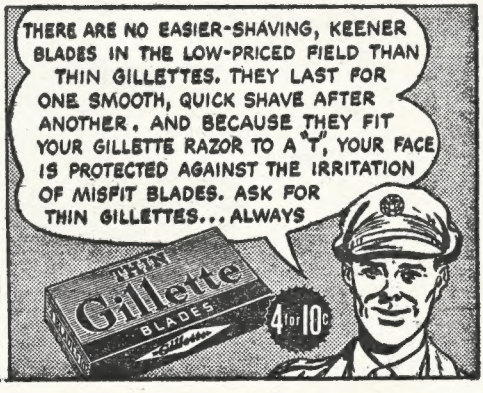
THANK YOU, SIR. I SURELY WILL
SHE'S A PEACH
SHOW UP WITH A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE, BILL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Adventure

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Vol. 115, No. 3 for July, 1946 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Comcomly and the King George Woman..... NARD JONES 40

If you never knew a one-eyed king with a pot belly and the ambition to marry a goddess it's time you met that blasted Chinook who ruled the roost along the lower Columbia back when Fort Astoria was center of the fur trade. Equally handy with bottle or wench he was no slouch when it came to holding his own in power politics either. Witness, for instance, the way he handled Captain Black, R.N. who started out to capture the old reprobate's domain and wound up in the royal red-skin's service instead—commodore of a fleet of two hundred dugout canoes.

Job Across Jordan..... GORDON MacCREAGH 66

All Mike MacIlvain wanted was a little of that hard-earned peace he'd heard so much about, but as Uncle's undercover emissary to the turbulent Middle East he'd picked a bad spot—and the wrong job—to enjoy it. Things were certainly in an unholy mess in the Holy Land, and the City of Brotherly Love—not the town Will Penn founded but the original Philly, capital of Trans-Jordan—was the hottest spot in the whole area. No wonder Mike regarded both Pan-Islam and Zion with a jaundiced eye after dodging bullets from either side. Obviously a Pan-MacIlvain Movement was what was needed to bring law and order to the territory and—with or without official sanction—the sooner the better.

SHORT STORIES

Don't Be Bitter..... ROBERT H. WALL, JR. 30

It was a crisis for Stinky and no mistake. Me, too, as invariably happens when the lad gets himself jammed up. It's usually women—and there, of course, I can always unravel any little problem that presents herself. But this time it was gambling. The lug had won himself a Philippine night club in a poker game the day before he was due to fly home, so someone had to "protect his investment." I'd have found it all so much simpler if the joint hadn't been out-of-bounds, subject to MP raids every hour on the hour, and a black-market drop for stolen GI property to boot.

Dames Dress Different..... DOUGLAS H. FOX 58

The name on the door read *Major H. H. Bekin, Security, USFA,* and raising his hand to knock, Garris felt as empty as the Nuremberg stadium on V-E Day. Six days AWOL on a three-day pass to Paris he was neck-deep in trouble. He needed a shave, he needed a haircut, he needed a uniform-press—but most of all he needed a miracle if he ever expected to emerge with his three stripes intact.

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BE OUT ON JULY 10TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Staff of Life.....JIM KJELGAARD 93
Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days, says the Scripture. Well, this wasn't water, it was snow—but to Trapper MacVeigh, marooned in that little cabin on the wrong side of the Big Hump, that last hunk of bannock he shared with the snowshoe rabbit—the only other living thing in that vast white wilderness—meant the difference between life and death.

Dingo.....JOHN HETHERINGTON 117
There's only one law for beast and man in the back-bush—cruel and unalterable—that only the fit may survive. And when the law is broken there's always an avenger—four-footed or two—to even the score when the code's been violated.

Snafu on Bogg Island.....GEORGE C. THOMPSON 129
Corporal Schuster, USA, was in a hell of a fix there on Bogg Island. He had a boatload of excess Egg Beaters, Handy-Mix, Automatic, to contend with and a serious shortage of Dubbin, Boot, Preservative—but his worst problem was, of course, a nerve-wracking over-supply of that omnipresent Army commodity: Tape, Red, Military.

SERIALS

Sword Land (1st of 4 parts).....HENRY JOHN COLYTON 8
Meet Brian Fitz-Brian—a mongrel if there ever was one. His Welsh blood gave him a good singing voice—his Norse strain huge stature and brawn—and the English in him the thick-headedness that kept him from knowing when he was licked and let him go blundering right along when another man more sensible would curl up and die. Tossed by a raging east wind on the Teeth of Leir with a drunk pilot, seven horses, twenty-six men-at-arms, three knights, two hogsheads of salt herring and a chaplain—all wallowing in the sea at once—it was no wonder his invasion of that hostile Irish shore almost failed before ever a beachhead was established.

White Javelin (conclusion).....NICK BODDIE WILLIAMS 96
In which a sword is sheathed and a pair of eagles fly again as Rick Hale treks his way out of the snow-swept Himalayan hinterland with Jo Brent and Tian Shan goading him on.

THE FACT STORY

The Camels Aren't Coming.....NAT McKELVEY 122
Forty thousand camels fought for the United Nations during World War II but not one of them bore a U. S. Army brand. Had Jeff Davis been alive during the recent conflict he'd have deplored this GI lack of "oonts" for it was his vision and energy which gave us our one and only Camel Corps before the Civil War. This is the story of that strange experiment in desert cavalry—as ill-starred a venture as any in the history of the West.

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire.....Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6
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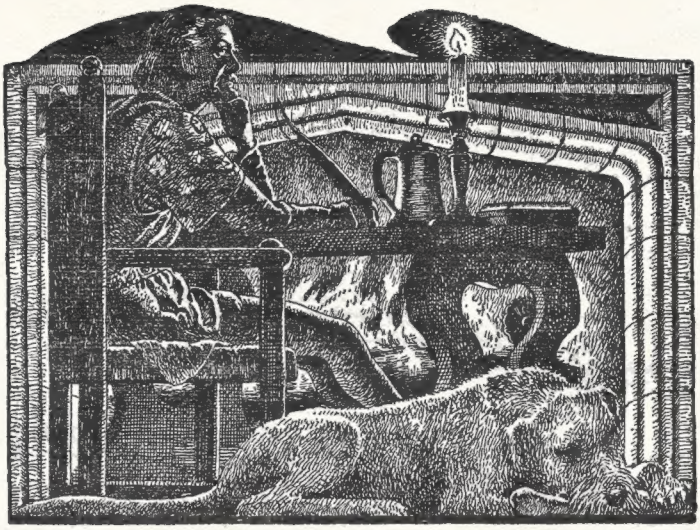
Ask Adventure Experts.....The men who furnish it 136
Lost Trails.....Where old paths cross 143
The Trail Ahead.....News of next month's issue 142

Cover painted for Adventure by Peter Stevens

Kenneth S. White, Editor



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

BEING the narrative of Brian Fitz-Brian, Armiger, describing the invasion of Ireland by the Geraldines, Edmund de St. Erne and others, in the years 1169-1171, and dealing particularly with the treachery of the Mac Breagh, Chief of Ballinmish, and his brother Abbot Aymon of Killanore; and of the massacre at Dun Cathach, and the remarkable deeds of the Lady Ceredwin de Morreise.

That, succinctly, is what Henry John Colyton told us his new novel "was all about" when we heard he was winding it up and about to post it *Adventure*-wards and wrote asking him what sort of yarn we could look forward to seeing on its arrival.

As soon as the story was safely ensconced in these pages with check for same in the author's hands we felt free to write demanding a bit more expanded notation on the background and genesis of the tale.

Here are Mr. Colyton's additional comments on "Sword Land"—

> Telling the story of Strongbow's conquest of Ireland from the point of view of one of his Norman adventurers would seem to be as risky a business as allowing a Tory to give his views on the Valley Forge operation . . . Or wearing an orange necktie on St. Patrick's Day. (Will all those wishing to interview the author kindly check their shillelaghs at the door?) Like my hero, I have a profound respect for the Irish nation; but its history seems to point out that the Irish themselves were their own worst enemies.
>
> Strongbow's invasion is another sample of what desperate men will do to dodge the sheriff. Practically the whole Norman handful were flat broke, unpopular at court for one reason or another, and with no prospects in view they were willing to take tremendous risks for the sake of a possible real estate deal. King Henry seemed willing enough to lose them in the bogs, but he felt rather differently when they proceeded to scoop in the east coast of Ireland, from Waterford to Dublin. He was quite irritated with Strongbow for being so successful, but matters were patched up between them, after Henry got his cut out of the affair. After a few generations, the Norman conquerors had made themselves so much at home in the Emerald Isle that they were, to quote a chronicler, "more Irish than the Irish themselves," and had long shaggy hair and complete disrespect for anything English. This was particularly true of the Fitz-Geralds, who engineered several rebellions along the line.
>
> If it seems hard to believe that a gang of less than a thousand men, all told, knights, bowmen and cooks' helpers, could meet and defeat the Irish nation, as well as their allies, the Danes, who had settled in the

(Continued on page 138)

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Original Story by Jerome Odlum
Associate Producer & Director - Joseph Kane
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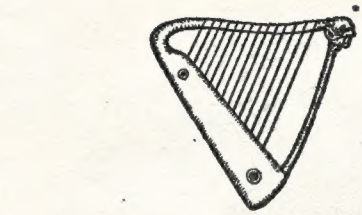
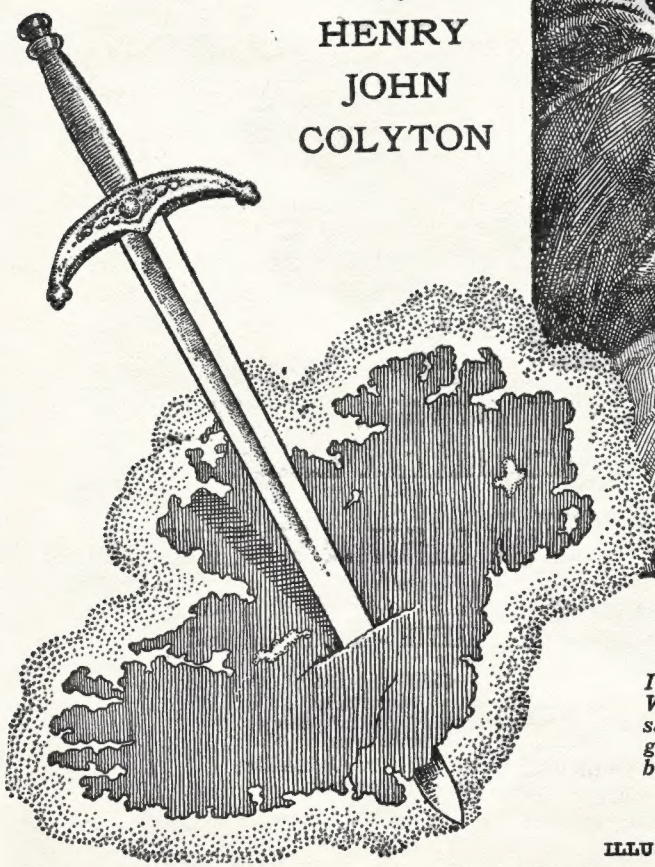


SWORD LAND

By HENRY JOHN COLYTON



I was trying to poke a fat Wiltshire knight out of his saddle, when the damn beast got his legs tangled and fell before I could jump free!

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

IF I were a true scholar, I'd call this account of the land we won in Ireland *Terra Gladii*, or something of the sort. I am well aware that the true scholar writes elegant Latin—wasn't I the bright boy among the novices at St. Waldeve's Priory years ago? But a man's speech is an odd business. I usually speak a scrabblement of French and English and Welsh, so that I'll be able to answer arguments when I give orders hereabouts. Of course, in polite company, I speak French exclusively—but I've noted that some of the Angevin crowd at court grin and poke each other when we western barons get to sounding off on a subject, and they imitate our accents; so I guess my French isn't French any more—any more than I am, I dare say. For although my great-grandfather came of the best blood of Normandy, and could look

down his nose at the upstart bastard, Duke William that conquered England, my grandfather, who built our first castle on the crest of Pen Mynydd here in the Marches of Wales, married a Welsh lady, who was herself the grand-daughter of a Norse pirate. My own father, then, married a girl whose family were English from away back. All this makes me a mongrel, I suppose, and bedamn if it's not a bad idea! For my Welsh blood gives me a good singing voice, my Norse blood, unusual stature and brawn—and as for my English blood, well, I suppose that has given me a thick-headedness that keeps me from knowing when I'm licked, and I go blundering right along when another man who was more sensible would curl up and die.

Well, since I am writing this account for my own satisfaction, I shall write as I please, and in our ordinary tongue. It has been suggested that King Henry will want to read this when I've done, but I know better; he couldn't sit still long enough. No, this is for my own satisfaction, and I still think it's not a bad idea.

For one thing, I am forty-one years old, and that is a time of life when a man ought to make a sober reckoning of himself, and take heed to his ways, as the Psalm says. And for another, this is going to be a long winter, and I've got to occupy myself in some way, or drive myself and my household crazy.

In two days it will be Hallowmass. Three weeks ago, the Earl of Gloucester threw the biggest tournament in years, and I went, of course, although my good horse Fiach had suddenly gone lame for no reason at all. I decided to use a green young stallion I'd just bought. Well, in the middle of the melee, when I was trying to poke a fat Wiltshire knight out of his saddle, didn't the damn beast get his legs tangled up and fall down crash, before I could jump free! And then rolled on me, and while my squires were trying to pry me out from under, the thing got up, stepped on my face, and trotted off to the end of the lists and started to eat grass!

By God, I thought the whole West Country would split itself laughing! And it was a good thing I had something else to worry about, or I would have been right embarrassed. More embarrassed, too, than another man would be. At a number of jousts, I've had fouls called on me for getting too rough with the opposition, just to make 'em forget I've got only one hand. I've never been more than middling good at tourneys—too many rules to keep in mind when I'm busy. But there for a while, when I shot off over the crupper in an engagement, they'd not say it was because I was careless, or because the other party was too good, but because I was crippled.

I used to get mad and swear about it, but I realized I'd have to show them. Not to brag, I think I showed this part of England. Well, then, you can see how embarrassing it was to get rolled on in the melee in full view of the Earl of Gloucester, and of a certain lady.

They picked up the remains and fetched 'em home on a door. I was lucky, in my usual backhanded way—the best surgeon and bone-setter in my knowledge lives right in my hall. The score was a side of ribs stove in, a broken nose, a smashed thigh and plenty of bruises, and from where I am now, it looks like a dull winter—tied up tight to a padded board, in my bed in the solar chamber, under surgeon's order to lie still and behave till I mend. I'm lonesome, too—the first week, I was rather poorly, and wasn't allowed company, and I think the neighbors were scared off. My nose and ribs are better, so I can breathe, at least, but I get infernally restless and gloomy.

Then a member of my household suggested that this would be a good time to set down the truth about Mac Breagh, the abbot of Killanore, and the Dun Cathach massacre. I wondered how I'd manage the ink-horn in bed, since I've got no hand to hold it—but Hugh Smith fixed up an inkstand that swings in front of me like a crane, and has a little trough for the pen, too.

Hugh's clever. He made the affair that makes it possible for me to use a shield—an iron hook, fastened to an iron cuff, that I strap to what remains of my left forearm. Nothing to wear in the presence of ladies, but handy in a brawl. I remember the night my squire and I were attacked by robbers on our way home from Scantlebury Fair. Any tale you may hear about the Devil of Whitemoss Moor refers to me, I believe—I only laid out one of 'em, but the rest ran, and I guess Whitemoss Bog might have got a few on their way home.

I seem to be running on. I've got into the swing of it now. The solar chamber is quiet, although I can hear the usual uproar from the hall, and my leg is quiet, too, for the time being. Anyone who heard me carrying on that first week—and God knows anyone within three leagues could have heard me—would know that I'm no philosopher. I enjoy a brawl and a quart of cider, and I understand that's not the way of philosophers. But by banging my fool head against stone often enough, I learned a sort of patience. I didn't care to lose my hand—I still miss it, and the stump aches most damnably in bad weather. But there were some compensations.

And perhaps this long winter ahead of me—a winter of helplessness, of having my meals in bed by day, and no pleasure there by night, of being waited on like a baby while my horse Fiach grows fat and lazy in his stall, and my hawks droop in the mews, and Christmas goes by—maybe something will come out of all this, too, besides this narrative.

I hope so.

CHAPTER I

THE TEETH OF LEIR

THE dullest winter I ever spent in my life came to an end in a terrific east wind that tossed icy spray over the ramparts of Dun Cathach, and broke a ship in two on the black rocks that the natives call the Teeth of Leir. It was April, on St. Cronan's Mass, but it felt like December.

As we stood watching the ship wallowing and screeching on the rocks, I recalled how our own party had been spewed out through the Teeth of Leir, when we had crossed over from Bristol in the dead of winter, with a drunk pilot —seven horses, twenty-six men-at-arms, three knights, two hogsheads of salt herrings and a chaplain. Lord! how we worked, in that awful icy wind, dragging spluttering men ashore by the seat of their drawers, hauling at the bits of the snorting, plunging horses. Yet we saved everything but one hogshead of herrings and the pilot. Edmund de St. Erne finished him off, trying to sober him up by holding his head under water. A dear lad St. Erne was, but heavy-handed.

We might have landed on the moon for all the life we saw. The great gray crag loomed above us through the tossing spray, with gray clouds clinging about its crest and dead thorn brush straggling up its flanks. We wallowed out on shore at last, cursing the day we'd seen fit to meddle with Dermot Mac Murrough's little schemes. But all of us were considerably cheered when we took a second glance at the cliff above.

For crowning its crest were low walls of stone, very ruinous, twisting about each other, full of bottle-necks and sharp angles. We knights looked at each other, and St. Erne patted the silver cross he always wore around his neck. It had been specially blessed at St. David's, and he trusted it.

"God knows who built it, but the parties seem to be gone now. Let's take over. A little work, and we've got a decent fortress all ready."

A little work, my foot! It took us a whole month of the hardest kind of back-breaking toil that the lowest villein couldn't have borne. We closed in and enlarged a rock-fed spring, halfway down the slope. We built a squatty square donjon that a 'prentice mason would have laughed his head off to see, but it would hold all of us and the nags, at a pinch, and some of the cattle that we stole. We had been attacked by a large party of shrieking warriors in yellow shirt-tails when we were working at the spring, and several of us got nicked. We couldn't let that pass without returning their call, so we did, and rounded up a few head of beef, which was a good thing, because the herrings were running short. Father Denis, our chaplain, was worried about it, but Art O'Gallin, Mac Murrough's interpreter, who was visiting us at the time, reassured him.

"Your Riverence will be findin'" he said, "that in Leinster and Desmond they fight and make love and get drunk by way of pleasure—their business is stealin' of each other's cattle."

Father Denis smiled feebly. He never could tell when O'Gallin was joking. O'Gallin had a long solemn face, ornamented by a pair of immense black eyebrows that crawled back and forth across the bridge of his nose like wooly-worms. He had a long upper lip that he kept shaven, Norman fashion, and bright blue eyes. He had gone with Mac Murrough to Aquitaine to ask King Henry for aid against his enemies, and he bided with Dermot at his town of Ferns while Dermot was waiting for the fuss to begin. Also, he'd arranged for St. Erne's expedition to get a toe-hold on the coast south of Wexford.

St. Erne in those days was a long stringy lad with a pair of red moustaches you could have hitched a horse to. He had helped escort MacMurrough back to Ferns, and on one occasion had prevented some of his relatives from inserting a knife between the royal ribs. And when the High King, Rory O'Connor, insisted on MacMurrough's sending back his allies, St. Erne made an arrangement to return and settle somewhere without making too much racket.

You see, in conquering a territory, you have to establish castles at intervals, never mind at what cost. Then they make a chain, so to speak, that is hard to break. Just as you can knock down one man easy, but find it harder to knock over one of three who are standing with their arms linked. We knew that Fitz-Stephen and the Geraldine crowd were going to take a hand in Dermot's affairs—they were all tough adventurers, and not prosperous. But Edmund de St. Erne was poor as any monk, and so were we all—we had to make an effort first, and take a bit more risk, too, so as to get in our claim to the land Mac Murrough was promising us.

O'Gallin acted as messenger between Ferns and Dun Cathach—that was the local name for our donjon. He would take a couple of well-armed gallowglasses as a matter of prudent foresight, and go loping off north and west to Ferns, bareback, in the Irish fashion, and come loping back in a day or two with presents from King Dermot as proof of his affection and fidelity. Some of the presents St. Erne asked for, in a polite way. He asked for some of those flowing yellow shirts for us to wear over our hauberks when we were tracing around the district. If we were supposed to be on a secret mission, there was no point in exposing our Norman harness prematurely. We even tried to ride bareback, but you have to be an Irishman for that.

Well, once we got settled, things smoothed

out, and it was, as I said, a dullish time. Dun Cathach was cold as the lowest circle of hell, and damp all the time. You could have heard us coughing and sneezing a league away. We would go out and look over the district in the early morning and evening, taking no risks, because there weren't so damn many of us. Any number of times, at first, we were attacked by yelling MacCarthys, Mac Breaghs and others. They threw spears at us, and discharged flights of little stubby arrows, neither of which did us any harm. They noted that, and also the fact that we headed for the old fort on the cliff at sunrise. After that, they seemed uneasy about us; thought we were ghosts, like enough, and so things got dull, for we didn't expect Fitz-Stephen till spring.

NOW that April day of the storm, when the strange ship was breaking up on the Teeth of Leir, it was high tide, and there wasn't much we could do, we figured, except look on and get Father Denis to pray for the souls on board. St. Erne and Milo de Clydach and I hung over the ramparts with the cold spray in our faces, watching the foam frothing through the Teeth of Leir, and hearing the awful screech of sundering timbers.

"What do you think," I bawled in St. Erne's ear, "of Milo and I going in for a look? There might be something we could use on board her, and we can swim—"

St. Erne was thinking of salt herrings, I guess, for he nodded. "We'll get ropes," he howled, "and for God's love be careful!"

The Irish sea in April is chilly. If we hadn't had such a congregation watching us from the ramparts, I guess Milo and I would have scuttled in out of the wet in a hurry. Milo was a good swimmer, and he went bobbing and splashing through the slopping icy waves like a grampus, and I followed, trying to see through the salt water. The cruel black rocks were crunching at the broken hull like an Irish chief at a marrow bone. The roaring sea and wind drowned every other sound. But I thought I heard a feeble sort of piping noise, like a sea-mew far off.

Milo hauled himself out upon a shoulder of wet black rock, just under the prow of the ship. He was bluish-purple in color. A giant wave sloshed over him, and I heard him yell a bad word at it before he started climbing onto the wreck. The ship had gotten herself impaled on the sharpest of Leir's snaggle-teeth, and was falling apart in chunks.

I climbed out, realizing, as the cold wind bit my hide, that the water hadn't been as cold as I had thought. My hands were so numb I could hardly unlimber the rope I'd wrapped around my center. I blew the salt water out of my nose, and stared back for a moment at the gray crag and the pale blobs that were the faces of the garrison, sticking to its surface here and there. I could see Eadmer, the man-at-arms who was in my service, standing close to the water, holding my cloak. He had given me considerable argument about my going out to the wreck, but he couldn't swim, so I had gotten off nicely.

Milo's head popped over the side.

"Hey, here's somebody alive!" he yelled. "He's got a wallop on the knob though—I'll hand him down."

The next moment I was grabbing at a tangled mass of wet mantle, with a head lolling helplessly at one end of it. The eyes were shut and the mouth open, and there was a red and purple bruise lumping up on his high narrow forehead. I spread him out on the rock, and was just turning to climb up again after Milo when I heard conversation. Milo was exhorting somebody to shut his fool mouth and stop wiggling, and a strangled voice was groaning above the racket, "Spare me! Spare me! O God! Don't kill me—I beg—I shall reward you— Don't! Don't!"

I hauled myself on board in a hurry. Milo was dragging a stout party along the slanting deck by the belt and the back of the neck. The stranger kicked feebly, and made grabs at Milo's purple knees, while he screamed "Mercy! Mercy!"

"He thinks you're a wrecker," I informed Milo, who was looking baffled and cross. "Hey!" I addressed the groveling stranger. "We're Christians; why don't you stop kicking so we can save your silly life?"

Something must have penetrated, for he gave up and collapsed into a huddle of wet clothes, his eyes bulging under the strings of thin wet gray hair, and his whiskers dripping off his double chin. We spread him out below, beside the other fellow, tucking them in careful so they wouldn't wash away. Then we struggled down the drunken hatchway and dragged out three men-at-arms and a monk. The men-at-arms were so seasick they didn't care whether they drowned or not, and the monk, up to his knees in icy water, was clutching at a splintered timber and praying feebly, and spouting water between prayers. He was a little fat fellow, and had been pink once, but was pea-green now, and no wonder. All of these, once we'd hauled them out, had to be reassured that we weren't wreckers.

When the little monk was convinced that we weren't going to slaughter him, he gabbled something, and pointed down the hatchway. I guessed that there might be treasure there, or something, and that he wanted to reward us. I bawled at him that we were too busy just now, reflecting that I wouldn't trade my warm lamb-skin-lined mantle, that Eadmer was holding for me, for all the treasure that ever came out of

"Anybody here?" I bellowed out, shoving back the door.

the sea. Milo was explaining to the soggy men-at-arms about the advisability of a raft, at the full blast of his lungs, and, I judged, with a chunk of timber.

I climbed down into the hold again. The water was sloshing through it like a mill-race, and as the Teeth of Leir crunched away at it, the whole hull trembled and screeched like a live thing in agony. The water was up to my thighs. I stared around the darkness, trying to listen for any sound of life, and I thought I heard a feeble sound of thumping or hammering, and I made out a door—a low sort of door, wedged shut by a broken fragment of the keel.

I wrenched and pulled at the broken beam, and at last the force of the water jerked it loose.

"Anybody here?" I bellowed, shoving back the door. The water poured inside, and something came toward me out of the dark with faint splashings, like the last efforts of a drowning kitten. I reached out and grabbed at it, just as a small hand caught at my arm. I gathered up wet clothes and long wet hair and a frail little shape with a throbbing heart shaking it through and through, and in considerable of a hurry, I went splashing toward the hatchway. The ship lurched sickeningly once, and I went under, but the next moment, I was swarming up the ladder, with something female under my arm.

God! but I was glad to see the black rocks and the gray windy sky! And Milo was frantically winding his rope around a couple of loose planks, while the men-at-arms pawed helplessly at the lashings. The dying ship was still struggling, but at any moment she might fall to bits.

I DROPPED my burden on the deck and went to help Milo, after reassuring myself that the fat man and the one with the bumped head were still on the rock slope where I'd put them. When I turned around, I met the

wide dazed stare of enormous blue-gray eyes looking up at me out of a white little face. Was she frightened of me? And then it occurred to me that the rattling I kept hearing must be my teeth, and that I had no rag or stitch of clothes on. I felt irritated. This was no time for a female to be squeamish.

Well, we got the raft down into the water—a loose-jointed thing it was, too—and loaded the fellow with the broken head aboard. The fat gentleman was moaning so loudly that we knew he must be feeling better.

We yelled at the men-at-arms to grab the raft and hang on. I turned to the girl, intending to load her on the raft beside the injured man, when I saw her slipping off the rock like an otter and making a grab for the raft. I heard her pipe up, "Come on, Father!" and the little monk tumbled in after her.

Well, the rest would have been easy, except that the ship broke up just as we shoved away, and a falling beam knocked Milo cold. He started to sink, but the little monk grabbed him by the hair and held his head out of the water until I could hoist him up and tumble him onto the raft.

The distance to the shore looked as long as the road to Holy Land. I kicked and shoved and yelled at the other to do the same, for I was worried about Milo, who sprawled on the planks without a move or sound. The men-at-arms did what they could, but Gray-Whiskers moaned, and let us drag him along, until I gave him a kick in the tail with as much force as I could summon under water. It made a bruise as big as your hand, for I saw it later; and he got started.

I was so water-logged and numb that I hardly knew it when we came banging up against the broken rocks at the foot of Dun Cathach. The raft was falling apart, and I was praying every saint I knew of to hold it together a bit longer, when I heard Eadmer's voice, and felt myself being hauled out of the water, and dragged over rocks that were sharp as knives.

After that things got vague and swimmy, until I found myself on a bench before a great leaping fire, my mantle wound around me and a mug of hot mulled ale knocking at my teeth. My ears were full of roarings, and I guess I made no protest as Eadmer marched me over to the pile of sheepskins that was my bed.

"Sir Milo—how's he doing?" I mumbled.

"Oh, he's all right, my lord—his blessed skull's as thick as a millstone. Lay down there now, and shut your jaw, or I'll tie you!"

I was sinking swiftly down into soothing warmth, when I remembered something. "'S a woman on board—better look after her, 'fore some of this gang gets there first—"

Eadmer's gooseberry green eyes bulged. "A woman? A *woman*? Why, I didn't notice her—hey! what's she doing in Ireland?"

"Looking for a husband, I guess," I mumbled, and fell instantly asleep.

CHAPTER II

THE MAC BREAGH OF BALLINMISH

AS soon as I woke next morning, with no worse cold than usual, I got busy. First I hunted up Milo; but he was sound asleep and snoring in his sheepskins, with his head done up in bandages like a Sarrazin's turban, and his right eye swelled up and black. While I swallowed some hot porridge and ale, I could hear the cattle bawling in the bailey, and the men making more uproar than usual around the fire. I gathered that a keg of some kind had drifted in and been rescued. At the upper end of the hall, St. Erne was having a jaw with Gray-Whiskers, now dried out, but looking rumpled and disgusted as he sat carefully on one side of his behind and wiped his inflamed nose on his sleeve from time to time. When I looked around for Eadmer, I finally spotted his bull shoulders and frowsy head on the other side of the hall from me, where, overnight, blankets had been rigged on ropes, like bed-curtains. I strolled over that way and heard him mumbling conversationally at the curtains, and a girl's voice answering.

"I do thank you so much—I can gather it, and it will do nicely."

For the first time in months, I felt of my jaw, but decided to let it go for now. It wasn't Irish, and it was female—that was all I knew, and all I needed to know. I cleared my throat, and addressed Eadmer. "Is her ladyship well?"

Eadmer turned, grinned, and closed one eye. Then he spoke politely as he usually did when there were strangers around. "Yes, my lord. Only her harness is still dampish, so I made her the loan of your Irish shirt-tail, not thinking you'd mind, my lord."

"Mind? I'm honored." I faced the curtains expectantly.

"Oh, Sir Brian!" It was a clear voice, and low-pitched, but with an excited ring in it. "I almost didn't recognize you yesterday, and then I remembered—I was so excited, and so scared, I didn't have my proper wits."

Eadmer's stern eye fell on me. "Madame," I said, "I too was excited. It is very improper of me—but I didn't recognize you."

A soft laugh. "That's good."

"Madame . . .?"

"I m-mean, I wouldn't want you to recognize me. Because the last time I met you, Sir Brian, I had lost my front teeth, and I'm afraid I was dirty. Do you remember the big tournament that the Earl of Arundel gave, at Winchester, and you won so many jousts, and mopped them all up in the melee?"

"I certainly do—that was my first big tournament, and I had undeserved luck, for I was green as grass. But—"

"Do you remember a little girl you caught trying to snatch a hair out of your horse's tail, and how you smacked her, and how she explained that the other novices at St. Milburgh's bet her she wouldn't dare venture, and she had to have proof of her story, and how you took her back to the wall where the other novices were watching the tournament when they were supposed to be gathering herbs, while Sister Berthe was asleep, and you kissed her hand, before them all? That was *so* kind, Sir Brian—I'll never forget it."

With which word she thrust aside the blankets, and the great blue-gray eyes met mine again. I had not noticed, in the excitement yesterday, how long the dark lashes were that rimmed them round, like reeds around twin pools. She was extensively clad in my yellow Irish shirt, and long wavy hair, the color of amber, hung over her shoulders, unbraided and dampish. She was not very big, but slender and graceful, and she bore no resemblance to my vague memory of that child at my first tournament. She was a dashed pretty girl, and her little teeth were white and even, and all there. I felt that things were improving at Dun Cathach.

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"I remember now," I said, reaching for her hand. "I tried to make it clear to you that a horse doesn't like to have hairs pulled out of his tail. You stuttered."

"I still do, if I'm not careful," she said.

Eadmer, who believes in the proprieties, for other people, coughed importantly. "This is the Lady Ceredwin de Morreise, my lord. That's her father, Sir Robert de Morreise, a-talking to Sir Edmund."

"You saved us all, yesterday," she breathed. "It was wonderful! We had given ourselves up for lost when the ship hit those awful rocks. And the other gentleman—Sir Milo—I hope he's better?"

Eadmer butted in again. "Yes, my lady—he's asleep. She bound his head—fixed him good."

"He's lucky," I said, still retaining her hand. "I wish I had a wound to be wrapped up. Have you breakfasted yet, madame?"

"Oh, yes, thank you—Master Eadmer brought me some excellent porridge and ale—"

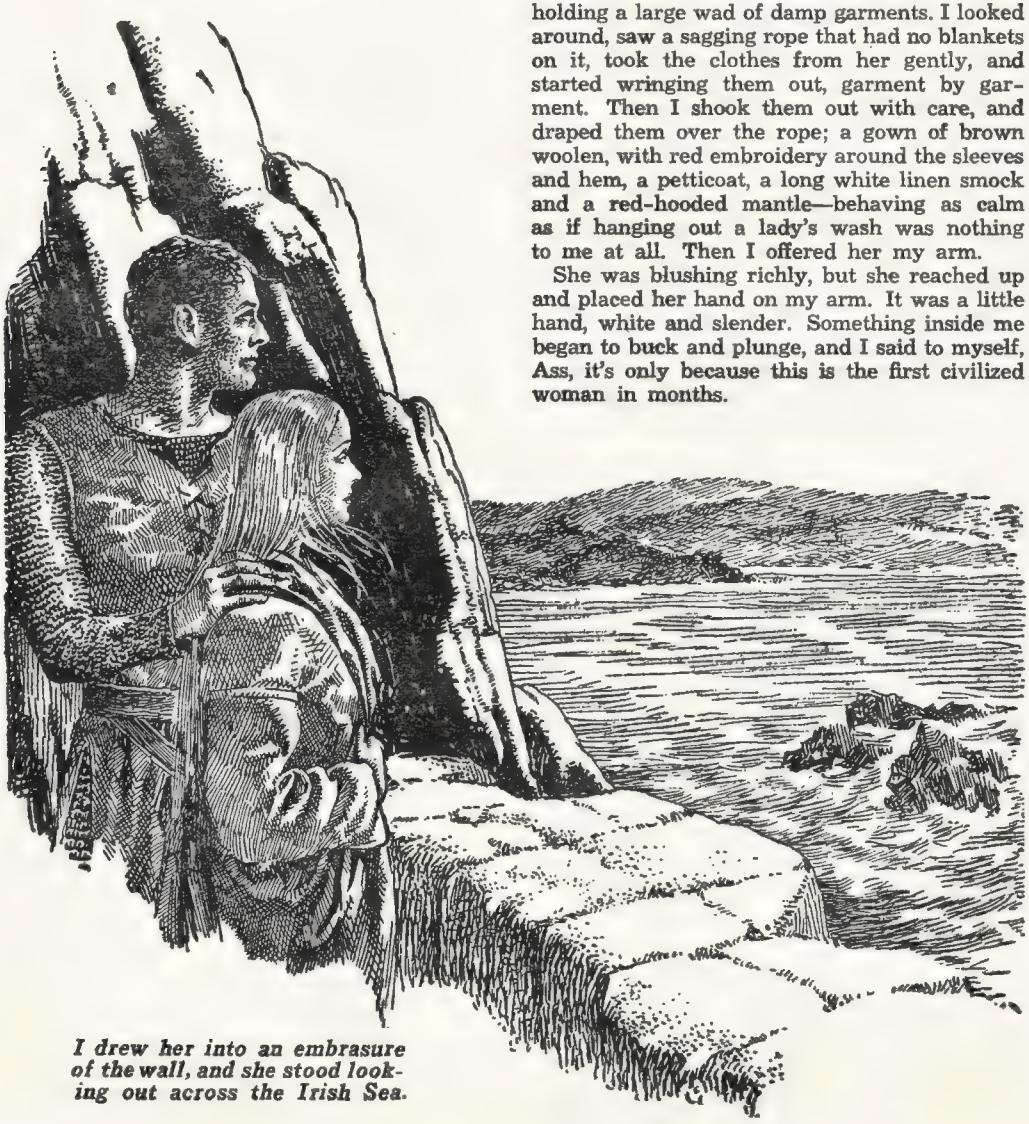
Eadmer was looking so smug I could have kicked him.

"Well, if you've eaten, let me show you around a bit," I invited.

"Thank you, Sir Brian. If you will wait until I've hung them up?"

"Hung what?" I wondered. I discovered that you had to wait, sometimes, until you could figure out what she was talking about. Now she ducked back inside the blankets, and came out holding a large wad of damp garments. I looked around, saw a sagging rope that had no blankets on it, took the clothes from her gently, and started wringing them out, garment by garment. Then I shook them out with care, and draped them over the rope; a gown of brown woolen, with red embroidery around the sleeves and hem, a petticoat, a long white linen smock and a red-hooded mantle—behaving as calm as if hanging out a lady's wash was nothing to me at all. Then I offered her my arm.

She was blushing richly, but she reached up and placed her hand on my arm. It was a little hand, white and slender. Something inside me began to buck and plunge, and I said to myself, Ass, it's only because this is the first civilized woman in months.



I drew her into an embrasure of the wall, and she stood looking out across the Irish Sea.

I TOOK her outside. The storm was over. The sea still frothed whitely at the base of the cliffs, but the sky was windy blue. I had gathered up somebody's mantle in passing, and I draped it over her tenderly.

"It's a lot for you to drag around," I said, "but you mustn't catch cold. Let's not bother looking at our cattle and the dung heaps in the bailey—let me show you the view."

I drew her into an embrasure of the wall, and she stood looking out across the Irish Sea and then at the woodlands and the hills beyond, while the sun brightened the amber waves of her loose hair and the breeze sent a delicate pink into her cheeks.

"It's nice and green," she murmured. "Maybe I'll like it."

I waited for her to address me, but she just stood there, her eyes on the distant hills. I was rather annoyed. The view was very well, but I was there too—and I was not accustomed to any lack of female attention, in those days. I had dug out my best gown that morning, the red one, and in spite of my cold, I thought I should interest her. Especially since I had been her hero when she was a toothless convent brat. She seemed properly polite, but she didn't wave her lashes at me. So I said, meditatively, "Ceredwin—you're Welsh, then?"

She turned to me at once, smiling, but her blue-gray eyes held no invitation. "Yes, on my mother's side, I am," she said.

"So am I, in part—my grandmother was Welsh." That wasn't getting me anywhere, so I shot off at an angle. "What's that knobby stuff in your gown—jewels?"

She gasped a little, but answered civilly, "Yes. We thought—my father thought—it was the safest way to carry them." She asked no question about the safety of her wash-line, for which I gave her credit, because the lads of Dun Cathach were tough-looking parties.

"I would hardly call it safe," I said, "to carry jewels, and what is far more priceless, a beautiful young lady, over the Irish sea at this time of year." I could have made a fancier speech, but my curiosity was getting the better of me.

She looked down at the breakers foaming white over the Teeth of Leir. It was high tide now, and no sign of the ship remained. She shuddered without sound, only with a slight trembling of her shoulders. Then she lifted her frank eyes again.

"We had to, Sir Brian. We were forced to," She paused, then went on. "My father was in peril of his life. The abbot of Killanore offered us shelter, and we came away at once."

Now, there would be just about one reason why anyone should flee for his life over the Irish sea at the wrong time of year—the displeasure of King Henry. When King Henry was displeased with you, you traveled—if you could. He and his sons were always quarreling, and he'd forgive the princes, but woe to those who supported the bad lads! So I said, "Treason, eh?"

She paled, but shook her head firmly. "No, messire. My father was talked about at court. So the abbot said we could come here for the time and make ourselves some good friends."

"Among Irish savages?"

"He's not a savage." She threw back her head. "He's very learned; he's been to Rome, and Jerusalem. And he's going to arrange a marriage for me with his brother, the baron of Ballinmish."

"Baron of— Oh!" I laughed, like a fool. "You mean Conn Mac Breagh—Lord bless us, he's no baron. He's only a chief—I've had some dealings with him, indirectly, over cattle." Then a thought struck me. "But he's married already!"

She was startled, incredulous. "Surely, messire, his brother would know." She was getting rather angry, too—her cheeks were red.

"People have delusions about their relatives," I said, thinking of Sir Robert de Morreise, and how much interest he had shown yesterday in the rescue of his daughter. "But Mac Breagh's married, my dear. And if he weren't, I'd think twice before I married a daughter of mine to him. He's a lying, treacherous, cattle-stealing scoundrel."

"The abbot says he is a modest and pious young man!"

There was a desperate note in her protest. I looked down at her indignant child's face, the golden freckles on her nose, the lifted chin. I put my hand on her shoulder.

"Never mind the abbot and his brother," I said. "Give some thought to me. I'm only a poor knight-bachelor, but I've never had more than one wife at a time, and I don't stab dinner guests in the back, nor rob travelers—besides, I can sing and play the lute passably, and I can give you a good game of chess on long winter evenings. How about considering me?"

Now, of course, I was only joking—about her marrying me, of course, not about Mac Breagh. I wasn't interested in marriage then. And certainly if I'd given the matter any thought, I wouldn't have considered the daughter of a runaway traitor to King Henry's peace; I would have been businesslike and prudent. But the odd thing was that I liked this girl very much, and I thought, marriage with her would be rather pleasant, though impolitic. In fact, I was so carried away with the idea that I stooped and kissed her. It tasted good, so I caught her in my arms and did it again.

When I say it tasted good, I don't mean that she responded. She stood, bewildered and helpless, and took my kisses as if they had been unwelcome presents thrust on her by an overenthusiastic host. I mean, her lips were soft,

like flowers, and her eyes were open, and as my face came close to hers, I drowned in their soft blue—rather the way you feel when you put your face into a bunch of violets held in a lady's two hands in April. And although the kisses told me that here was a lass straight from the convent, carefully instructed in good manners and embroidery, and left as ignorant about how to behave with a man as St. Ursula herself would like to see—I enjoyed them.

I put it down to those months of boredom, because ordinarily I liked the ladies of my acquaintance to be more knowing—to be able to respond to a gentleman's casual love-making with easy charm, and to give me back the like in kind. But this child—for she was no more, in spite of the little breasts showing their firm roundness under the saffron linen—seemed to have a delicate freshness about her that I found charming, too. So since she made no objections, I gathered her gently to my breast, and pressed my mouth down upon hers. And if you think this sounds like a bumptious ass with notions about himself as a devil with the ladies—why, how right you are!

I heard a noise, but I gave it no attention for a while. Then the girl, who had made no resistance as yet, began to wriggle in my arms. I looked around then, and saw that we had company.

HE was standing just behind me, his eyes glittering under dark penthouses of brows. By the red and purple knob on his brow, I recognized him as the long bony party I'd spread out on the Teeth of Leir yesterday.

"Sir," he said, extending a long hand, "release the lady."

Well, tall as he was, I was taller, so I gave him my stare of uncomprehending indifference—it works wonders, on crusty innkeepers and indifferent countesses—and while I released Ceredwin from my embrace, I retained her hand. It shook a little in my clasp.

"Who the hell are you?" I inquired. "This is a private conversation you're butting into, d' you know?"

"I am Aymon Mac Breagh, abbot of Killanore," he announced. His voice was deep-toned and musical, like an organ; but the airs he put on were irritating. "The lady is betrothed to my brother."

"The Mac Breagh of Ballinmish," I said. "Now that's interesting. What became of his other wife?"

The abbot condescended to smile. "I assure you, messire, my brother is not married. A few irregularities may surely be pardoned in a great chief? Certainly your own English king has been known to commit like follies."

Well, that was true enough, of course, but the nerve of him, comparing a bog-trotting Irish chieftain to King Henry! He was looking me over, and I saw the flicker of his eyes. They were his only handsome feature—green as emeralds, and well set. He had an enormous long thin nose, and protruding lips like a duck's bill, a high brow, ears like sails and a narrow jaw. His cheeks were deep-hollowed, and his red hair had been tonsured in the ancient Irish fashion—shaved off the front part of his head. I learned later that the was only five years older than I, but he looked middle-aged—his shoulders were stooped, and his bedraggled, wrinkled gown hung loose on his bony frame.

"Well, appearances are deceptive—I would have sworn the lady was his wife. And how do you feel, Father, after your dip in the sea yesterday?"

He smiled deprecatingly. "I am in some distress from the blow on my head—but it will pass, with the help of St. Ibar."

Ceredwin had recovered herself by this time, and she gave tongue at this point. "Sir Brian saved your life yesterday, Father Aymon," she said, "and mine, too, and father's, and Brother Teague's, and the soldiers'—"

"Hold on," I protested. "I only went out there to keep Sir Milo out of mischief—he's the lad whose head you bound up."

"My brother," said the abbot stiffly, "will be properly grateful to you for saving the life of his brother, and of his promised bride."

Now the abbot of Killanore spoke good French, with only a slight accent—but the accent was getting thicker, and I suppose that he was quite put out with what he had seen. People who have forsworn the embraces of the other sex, I have noticed, seem to take other people's embraces as a sort of personal affront.

"Why, I was glad to do it," said I jovially, and feeling prankish, I added, "Glad to save the life of any bride of his, any time, if he'll just let our cattle alone for a while."

The green eyes flashed. I should have kept my mouth shut, of course. But I didn't, and I don't know how much of our later troubles came of it. However, the abbot smiled a tight-lipped smile and answered, "The Mac Breagh has cattle of his own and in plenty. And who may you be, that insult him?"

"Oh, come, Father—nothing personal, I assure you." No more there wasn't—in dealing with the whole Mac Breagh clan, it had been necessary to fasten down everything that wasn't planted in the ground. "I am Brian Fitz-Brian, at your service." And I bowed. The green eyes kindled.

"Fitz-Brian—the name is surely Irish—and you are of kingly stature. Are you of the blood of Brian Boru, who beat the Danes at Clontarf?"

I stared. "I wouldn't know, but I don't think so. I'm of the blood of the Fitz-Brians of Pen

Mynydd, and our only accomplishments are being able to hold more October ale and kiss more girls without drawing breath than any of our size in England." I heard a sudden giggle, as suddenly suppressed, but I kept my face as solemn as an owl's—not that an owl has much face. "Tell me, Father," I went on in a hurry, for I felt my dignity slipping off, "were you one of those who accompanied King Dermot to Aquitaine?" Making polite conversation, you see. But the abbot started back, as if I'd asked him when he'd last visited the devil.

"I? I accompany Dermot of the foreigners on his traitorous journey? Fitz-Brian, were I not the humble shepherd of the flock of Killanore, your blood would answer that!"

"Why," I asked innocently, "isn't he supposed to be the King of Leinster? And doesn't that make the Mac Breaghs his vassals?"

"The Mac Breaghs are no man's vassals, Fitz-Brian! Shame take the word!"

"Well," I was honestly puzzled, "I'm a vassal of St. Erne, and of King Henry, and of King Dermot too, I guess, and it's no skin off my nose. A man is usually vassal to somebody—that's the way the world is managed."

"Not Ireland! We are vassals to nobody! You are young, Fitz-Brian—and sure, it may be that your heart is sound, despite your foreign blood. Let me tell you, it will be better for you if you go back whence you came, for there is blood upon your feet and upon your hands, and behind you I see smoke and flame! Go back whence you came, Fitz-Brian, or your bones will be whitening upon Ballinmish before a half-year passes—yes, you and the rest of the Galls that Dermot-of-the-foreigners has called upon! You will die, and the sons of Erin will spit upon your corpses, where they lie upon the dung-heap! You fight in no righteous cause!"

I was surprised at his vehemence. "Well, well," I said meekly, "it's not for me to question my betters, good Father. We were only given some land here, and we're trying to manage it, and live as peaceable with our neighbors as they'll let us. But I wouldn't spit on any corpses, if I were you sons of Erin—it ain't mannerly, and they might not all be corpses."

"Fitz-Brian," he fixed me with his glittering icy eyes, "you meddle, and you are impudent. I have heard something of your reputation with women, too; a lecher and a fornicator you are, and this lady is my brother's betrothed wife. It is no fault of yours, Lady Ceredwin," he turned to her, more in sorrow than in anger, "you are young, and how should you know the wolf until he bares his fangs? Come with me—your father is waiting for you, to give you his wise counsel—and I have sent messengers to Ballinmish and to Killanore. Your lord will come soon, and my household, to give thanks for the saving of our lives to St. Ibar and all the archangels."

"And to S-Sir Brian and Sir M-Milo, too," she added, smiling up at him sweet enough to kiss. "They helped."

He stared at her. "A betrothed maiden should be less forward in her speech, Lady Ceredwin. And less free in her behavior in the company of men; especially knights of evil repute. You are young, as I said—you do not realize how your reputation may be blown upon."

She blushed, and hung her head, and I spoke up again.

"Especially ought the bride of that pure young man Conn Mac Breagh to be careful," I said solemnly, and I was about to enlarge upon the virtues of that unwashed cattle-thief, when the abbot towed Ceredwin off, and left me standing there on the ramparts feeling a bit silly. St. Erne had asked us not to antagonize the Irish chiefs any more than we had to, until the shooting started—and Abbot Aymon was the brother of a chief, and the head of a prosperous abbey, from what I'd heard of it. Only he had irritated me with his solemn prophecies and his remarks about my character; and before a lady too; and I felt too, that I hadn't been very skillful in my fencing with him. Neither skillful, nor reverent. After all, I was bred to the church, back there at St. Waldeve's Priory; I should have been more respectful.

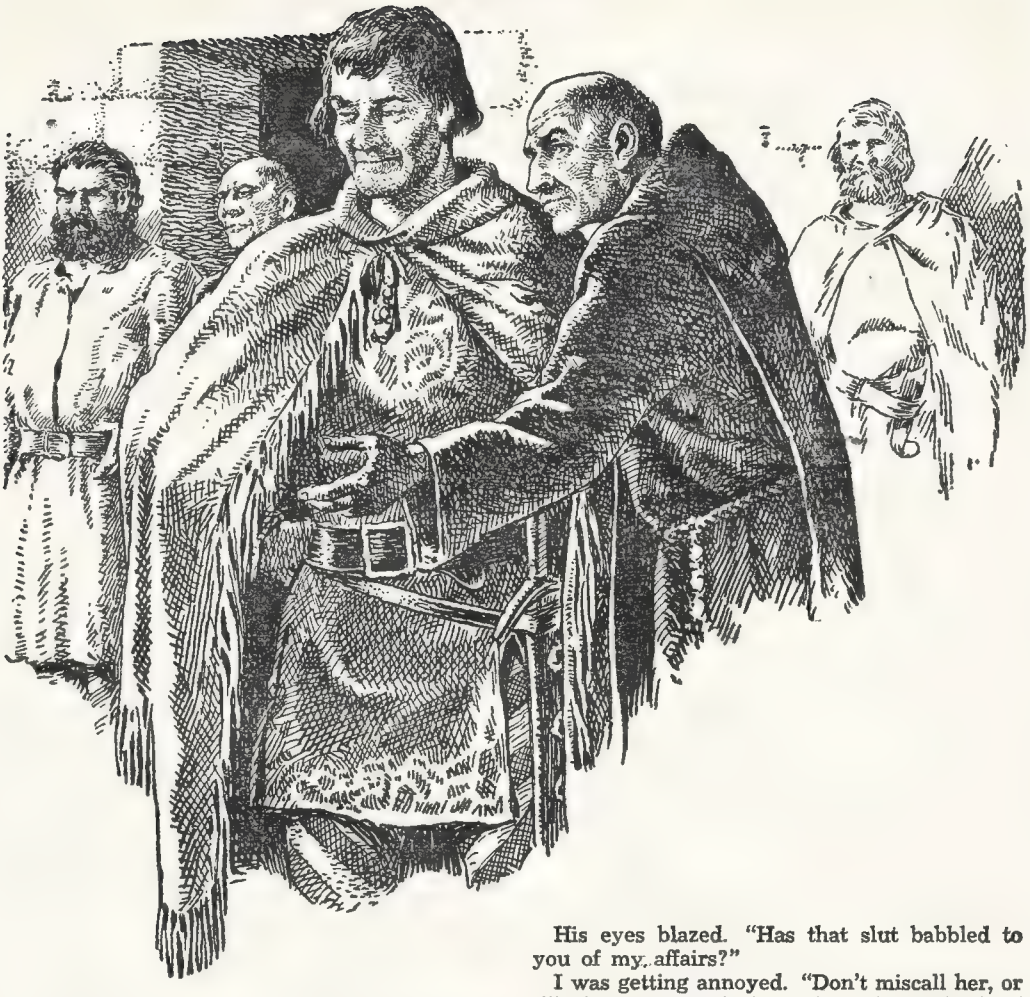
Her eyes opened wide when she saw her lord, and her free hand clutched convulsively at her gown.

"But to call me a lecher and a fornicator—that's a bit thick!" I reflected angrily. "How would he know about my reputation with women? And anyhow, I haven't so much as looked at a woman, at least a woman with a clean face and shoes on, for months—wolf, he calls me!" I snorted and strode off, thinking, as I went, that little Ceredwin was too pretty and too ignorant to deserve the fate that was coming to her. I thought to myself, I would be doing her, and myself as well, a favor if I threw her across my saddle-bow and eloped with her. I know now that it would have been the most sensible thing I could have done—it would have saved her much suffering, and me my left hand, and Dun Cathach might not have fallen to its enemies. But I was trying to be prudent and not get tangled up in Irish politics—and that's where being prudent gets you.

CHAPTER III

A DAGGER FOR THE BRIDE

ABBOT AYMON and his party stayed at Dun Cathach for two days, while a pair of Art O'Gallin's kernes went off as messengers to the Abbey of Killanore, and to the Mac Breagh's hall at Ballinmish. I made sev-



eral attempts in the meantime to get Sir Robert de Morreise by the scruff and, when I finally caught him, I thrust argument after argument at him, but they all splintered like tourney-lances against the solid front of his self-importance and injured dignity.

"At least," I shook a finger at him, "you ought to wait until you see the fellow before you give final consent to the marriage! The Mac Breagh is a nasty bit of work!"

He swelled up like a frog and his double chin quivered. "It seems to me, messire, that you are endeavoring to meddle in affairs that do not concern you!"

'Sure," I admitted. "But when I see somebody starting to take a stroll across a bog, I give warning, whether it's meddlesome or not, before they sink in over their heads! If you're in trouble at home, why don't you just lie low for a while? King Henry probably will cool off, and—"

His eyes blazed. "Has that slut babbled to you of my affairs?"

I was getting annoyed. "Don't miscall her, or I'll shove your whiskers through the back of your head! Lady Ceredwin is no babbler. I'm just guessing why a man should make a journey over the Irish Sea in this weather with a fortune in jewels—yes, I discovered that for myself too. I suppose you sided with the princes or with Pious Tommy—I mean, of course, his grace the Archbishop of Canterbury—in the recent unpleasantness? Well, the King and the Archbishop will patch it up sooner or later, and then—"

"Messire," he cut in icily, "I thank you for your concern in my poor affairs, but I beg leave to manage them myself, without the help of any penniless knight-bachelor. If you are covetous of my jewels—I owe you something, perhaps, for the saving of my life—you may choose what you will."

He spoke with the air of one gently reproving an indifferent stableboy who has been hinting for a tip. It was no good. I wanted to thump his thick skull against the ramparts.

"Well, messire," I said, "the only jewel of yours that I'd consider is the one you're going to hang in a swine's snout. If you had any mind or any heart, you might realize what you're doing."

I stormed off, and kicked the wall and swore. I even talked to St. Erne and Milo about it, at the risk of being considered unduly interested in a skirt. St. Erne invited me to remove my nose from another man's affairs, and Milo told me that I was too young to start robbing cradles. St. Erne was very much married to a nagging wife and a pack of brats back in Wales, and Milo had only just managed to dodge an engagement with a cousin of his, who was homely enough to make your eyes water, he said. They were unconcerned, because we were expecting Fitz-Stephen with the warm weather, and they didn't want stray girls and outraged abbots getting under foot when the fun started. I know it seems very stupid of me, and sentimental, too—but bless my heart, how I pitied that plucky child who was being sacrificed to the political interests of a father who had all the noble-hearted generosity of a boar pig in a trough of swill.

Well, at dawn of the third day, we had more company. Mac Breagh of Ballinmish and forty tribesmen and ten monks. Mac Breagh and some of his lieutenants were well mounted—the rest came on foot, the monks singing hymns, the kernes howling insults at each other and breaking into fights here and there down the line. St. Erne thought that here was a chance to mend our fences, so we butchered some beeves and gave them a feed. I had been pretty busy, and not until St. Erne summoned me into the hall, did I encounter Mac Breagh.

"Fitz-Brian," yelled St. Erne from the high seat, across the roar of the fire and the excited gabble of the Irish subchiefs, "here's the Mac Breagh himself, to thank you for rescuing the lady!"

I dodged back. "It was more Milo than me, and—" But the next moment Mac Breagh had emerged from the crowd around the fire, and wrapped his arms around my neck. It was a real bear hug, for he was one of the hairiest parties I ever encountered. He kissed me two or three times, and spoke fervent Erse at me. I had met him before, of course, or it would have been a shock. He had long dark hair, and three weeks ago, I supposed, he had had a long dark beard. I learned later that he had cut off his beard and shaved his chin two days before, to show that he could be as civilized as anybody. He wore his fanciest church-going harness—a red silk mantle, full-cut and trimmed with long fringe, a pair of trousers, tighter than his hide and gaily striped, and a fancy leather jerkin. What you could see of his complexion was white—or whitish—he might have had a bath last Easter, and his nails were in deep mourning. When he wrapped himself around my neck, he didn't smell like rosebuds. Of course, these are small things. I might not have noticed them, at another time; but I was thinking of Ceredwin, so dainty and delicately bred, in those long hairy arms, and it went against me.

The abbot of Killanore stood at my elbow. "My brother, the Mac Breagh, thanks you for your rescue of his brother and his lady," he interpreted gently. "He wishes to give you a present."

I was trying to pull away as tactfully as I could. I was taller than the chief, but not so wide around—I could look down at his face. It was smiling, through the fog of stubble, but the green eyes, green as the abbot's, has fastened upon me with a look that made me rather doubt if I'd care to get the present—a knife in the ribs, as like as not. But the abbot was continuing,

"He gives you two fine horses, of the best breed, with his compliments."

Now I doubt if he said it just that way, but those were the abbot's words. My instinct was to tell him to take his horses and ride to the devil, but we had learned early that to refuse a chief's gift is a deadly insult. So I made the prettiest speech I could think of, and said I'd be delighted. He smiled broadly then, while his eyes still glared at me, and clasped my hand. I knew what he was up to then—he wanted to crush my hand and show how strong he was. But I knew that trick—I just laid my thumb on his index-knuckle joint, and he was baffled. But just at that point, up came Sir Robert de Morreise, puffing along importantly, and towing his daughter by the hand.

I SAW her eyes open wide when she saw her lord, and I saw her free hand clutch convulsively at the folds of her gown. But she had been well brought up—she lifted gallant eyes to the soiled savage, and swept him a graceful courtesy. He smiled at her fiercely for a moment, while his brother spoke what were doubtless cautions in his ear. Then he stepped forward and clasped Ceredwin in an ardent embrace. I saw the desperate look in the blue eyes looking over his shoulder. He was squeezing the breath out of her, while his brother beamed benignantly.

"Unless the Mac Breagh prefers his brides with their ribs broke, you'd better do something," I suggested, and walked off, without waiting to see what resulted. The first party I met, out in the bailey, was Eadmer, and he had been looking for me. His face was grim.

"Why ain't you in there, watchin' 'em lead that pore little 'un to the slaughter house?" he demanded. "The good saints help her, since nobody else seems to want to."

"Listen," I said, "who was it was lecturing me about mixing up in Irish politics, not three nights ago?"

"'Taint for *me* to say," he began, and I grinned, knowing that he would say it at some length, and he did, holding forth on the marital characteristics of the Mac Breagh and the virtues of Lady Ceredwin, to whom he'd taken a strong fancy. "And I guess," he wound up provocatively, "that all this chivalry stuff is wind—or else I got it wrong. I'm only a man-at-arms—for all my great-grandfather was at Hastings—I'm ignorant. A chivalrous knight is one that has a dozen affairs with a dozen dames at once, but don't bother his head none about a pore little gel that needs his help—"

I pushed my fist into his mouth to shut it and walked off. And here came a kerne of Mac Breagh's, his long hair plaited and looped over his ears, his yellow shirt billowing in the breeze, and a dirty look on his face. He was leading two horses, straight up to me. They were something to see—both young bays, dancing uneasily on the cobbles, their eyes rolling. A whole gang of kernes came tagging after, grinning. I knew what they were after. They wanted to see the foreigner light on his head on the paving stones. So I called Huw ap Hoel, one of our Welshmen, and asked him to fetch my saddle. When the Irish party saw it, there was loud laughter, and impolite gestures. So Huw and I went to work. We got the first beast saddled—after tying his fore and hind legs securely together. Then I mounted, and Huw, darting in with real courage, slashed the hobbles. The bay rose straight up into the air and came down stiff-legged, and the Irish whooped. I was jarred, of course, but I gave the horse a rake with my spurs, calling him a choice name in English, which is the best tongue I know for calling names in. Well, after all, I rode almost before I could walk, as anyone can tell by looking at my legs. I rode that horse all around Dun Cathach at a furious gallop, and jumped the lower rampart three times, and trotted back into the bailey with a subdued chunk of horseflesh between my knees, and there was no more shouting—only dirty looks and threatening gestures. I thought, that's the Irish for you. A pack of sullen Englishmen would have grinned appreciatively, if the same trick had worked out so for them—but an Irishman is a bad loser. I felt sad and homesick. But at least, I'd shown them that a man who uses a saddle isn't the world's worst horseman.

Well, it seemed everybody was setting out for Ballinmish the next dawn. I accordingly cornered Ceredwin before she left. Her father had been bellowing for her, but she was taking her own time behind the curtains of her bower. I wondered what she was feeling—if she felt that she must hold tightly to every moment of her freedom. When everyone seemed to be out in the bailey, I dodged back into the hall, and called her by name.

She thrust back the curtains. She was sitting on the pallet Eadmer had fixed up for her, all dressed and ready, her red mantle on, and its hood pulled over her head. She looked up and tried to smile.

"I'm sc-scared," she said.

I sat down beside her. I had to find out a few things, but it was embarrassing. I examined my heavy gold seal ring as if I'd never seen it before.

"Ceredwin," I asked, "is your mother living?"

"Oh, no, messire. She died when I was little." She looked puzzled.

"Well," I gulped, "dear me. Er—did the abbess at your convent ever tell you—er—what to expect—what your husband does when you're married?" I mopped at my brow.

She was baffled. "Why, yes, Sir Brian. She said he would give me the keys of the household, and that I should be humble and faithful in my duties to him."

"Oh, damn," I said. "Why, in the name of St. Bridget, didn't you bring a waiting-woman?"

"Why, I have none, Sir Brian—and when father spoke of getting one of his distant relatives to go with us, the abbot said it would be

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The bay rose straight up into the air and came down stiff-legged, and the Irish whooped.

better for my lord to give me a lady from his household, who—"

"Who can't speak a word of French, any more than you can speak Erse. Look, Ceredwin. Why don't you throw the whole scheme over? I'll follow you and steal you tonight—and I promise you, on my honor as a knight, to send you home on the first craft available, just as ignorant as when you left the convent. Though where you'll go then . . . Lord, a girl's a helpless thing!" I plowed my fingers through my hair, snatching for a plan.

She said earnestly, "Thank you, Sir Brian. You're *ever* so kind! Just like the day of the tournament! I told the girls, 'He's like Sir Lancelot and Charlemagne rolled into one,' and I was right! But I can't, you see. Father has his plans all made, and he wouldn't like it if I'd upset them. And the abbot will help me. But I'll always remember how kind you are!"

SHE put out her hand. It was a child's hand still, with soft dimpled fingers and pink nails, and all the grace of childhood—not the grace that's carefully practiced before a mirror. I kissed her hand, as I had long ago on the tourney-field, while my mind scrabbled around and around. I couldn't elope with her—not without imperiling our little force at Dun Cathach, for Mac Breagh was a powerful enough chief, for all he wasn't washed. And I'd come to Ireland to assist Mac Murrough, not to run off with females. As I shifted about restlessly, my hand struck my dagger-hilt, and I got an idea.

"Here," I drew out the weapon, thankful that it was sharp and polished bright to look like a proper gift, "you'd better take this along. It's good to mend a pen or cut a slice off somebody who disagrees with you. And here, take the sheath, too, before you cut your fingers off."

She sat there holding it as gingerly as if it had been a frog.

"Stick it in your garter," I advised, recalling a lady from Guienne I had once encountered. I was about to add that I would turn my back, when she lifted her skirts, promptly as a new man-at-arms obeying orders, and displayed a slim leg in a red woolen stocking, with a blue garter twisted below the knee. I gulped, but said nothing, figuring that here was something else the abbess hadn't told her about. She thrust the sheathed dagger carefully through the garter, and looped the leather hanger around it, with no more self-consciousness than if I'd been the lady-in-waiting she stood in such need of, poor child. Then she decorously shook down the skirts, and my eyes returned to their sockets.

"Good," I said feebly. "Out of sight, but handy."

Sir Robert de Morreise was bawling her name, outside, and I thought she would go now. But she looked at me earnestly and said, "It isn't lucky, Sir Brian."

"Huh?"

"It's edged—it will cut our friendship. I'll have to give you something for it."

She began fumbling in the hem of her sleeve, so I said in a hurry, "Well, give me a kiss, then—I haven't had a girl kiss me in ages, and that will fix things up nicely."

"All right," she said, with a delightful smile. I bent my head, and she lifted her face, her mouth a puckered rose, and gave me a good hearty smack on the mouth. I took her in my arms—it was as if I were compelled—and returned the gift. But I did have the decency to get up quick then, and haul her to her feet, and we were well started for the door when Sir Robert de Morreise, St. Erne, the abbot of Killanore and the Mac Breagh came charging into the hall.

Well, there were some forced jokes about ladies' delays, and some dark looks passing between de Morreise and the abbot. But they were in a hurry, and the business passed off better than I had hoped, and I was thankful, for her sake. I leaned on the battlements, and watched her ride away, between the abbot (on a fine black mule the monks had brought) and the Mac Breagh, her father bouncing along behind, unregarded. I watched her until the last flutter of her red mantle had vanished below the hill, and turned away, feeling oddly blue and empty.

An hour after they left, a rider came galloping up the road from the south. He came charging up the steep ramp to the lowest rampart of Dun Cathach, and reined in, yelling the name of O'Gallin.

O'Gallin tore out of the bailey, where he'd been idly rolling dice with Huw ap Hoel, and ran down to the barrier like a man possessed.

He came back, his eyes gleaming, escorting the messenger, who was one of Mac Murrough's gallowglasses.

"It's the good news that's in it!" he announced to the crowd of us emerging from the bailey. "The trouble's starting! He says that a ship full of armed men has anchored in the mouth of the Bannow—Fitz-Stephen and his men! I'm off, boys—the king must be told at once."

And he rode off for Ferns, his long black hair streaming behind him like a pennon, and the gallowglass trying to keep up.

Well, we had to draw straws for it. We had to leave a garrison at Dun Cathach, and to be left behind on guard is a cruel hard fate to impose on tough lads who have been bored to death all winter. So we all drew straws. Poor Milo drew a short one, and so did ten men-at-arms. I'm none of your mealy-mouths, but I never heard such swearing in all my life. The air over the dun was solid dark blue, and I heard words I'd never heard before.

Eadmer looked bland and smug. He was going along, of course. I rather think he'd arranged which straw to pull. He rode knee to knee with me all the way to the Bannow, solemn-faced as if he'd been on his way to Mass.

We didn't bother to disguise ourselves. It was only a matter of three leagues, through thick woods mostly, and the steel helms flashed bright in the patches of sunlight as we pounded along, St. Erne in the lead, looking carefully from side to side for any sign of trouble. But all we saw of the Irish nation was a shock-headed boy without any clothes on who was pasturing some half-wild hogs in the forest. He gaped at us, and we waved at him as we fled by.

And then the Bannow was flowing between its wooded banks, with the Irish Sea deep blue beyond in the May sunlight, and masts struck up dark against the sky, just beyond the wooded bulk of an island in the middle of the river, where it broadens to the sea. Smoke was curling up lazily from the island's center.

"That's them," announced Eadmer, "although I don't hear no noise of fighting."

"Give 'em time," I advised, as we thundered down the slope to the river. Fitz-Stephen was the sort of leader for an expedition like ours to have—he had guards posted that challenged us while we were still in the brush. Welsh archers, they were, so we answered in a hurry. A Welsh bow can plug an arrow through steel, you know. They passed us on, and we waded the horses out into the shallows, while St. Erne rose in his stirrups and howled an insult in Welsh that brought Fitz-Stephen himself boiling out of the island thickets to stand with his toes in the water and answer back. You could never mistake him—a big red-faced husk in a bob-tailed brigandine, with little bright eyes twinkling over a moustache like a double waterfall.

"Come over," he invited, waving his hand like a bunch of sausages, "Dyfydd will show you the ford. . . Dyfydd!" he bellowed, and a little dark man slipped out of the brush and stood grinning at us.

Well, we were crowded, there on the island, but everybody was happy and noisy, and most of the newcomers had a skinful already. We went around, St. Erne and I, looking up old acquaintances of the Welsh marches, and accepting swigs of Welsh ale here and there until we got noisy and happy too, and I have a vague memory of raising my voice in song, and a half-score of archers joining in on close harmony, until somebody threw a bucket of water over the gang of us.

LATER that evening, when the men snored around the campfires, and a salt wind from the sea made us shiver in our thick frieze mantles, St. Erne and I had converse with the leaders—de Prendergast and Robert de Barri and that sour-faced lad Hervey de Mountmaurice and Fitz-Stephen. I wasn't friends with all of them, but it seemed mighty good to see so many rough parties who weren't Irish. We told them about de Morreise, and Fitz-Stephen swore.

"As if I didn't have troubles of my own!" he complained. "The King don't trust me anyhow—didn't he let my uncle Rhys keep me bottled up in Cardiganshire two whole years? Now if de Morreise mixes himself up with us, I'll bet you we lose everything and wind up in a royal donjon somewhere—say, where is this Mac Murrough, anyway? I don't trust these Irish!"

"O'Gallin went off with the message—he'll be here, all right," St. Erne assured him. "We're all he's got to get back his kingdom with. He's peeved with King Rory for running him off his land."

"Something about somebody's wife, wasn't it, or something?" asked de Barri.

"That's the idea," said St. Erne. "He eloped with the wife of another tuppenny chieftain, name of O'Rourke. And from what I hear, it wasn't anything unusual—they're always stealing each other's cattle and women back and forth. The High King Rory used it as a good excuse to bang a club over his head, that's all."

"He had the result with him at Bristol," said Fitz-Stephen. "Best-looking girl you ever saw—smoky blue eyes and black silk hair, and a shape—whoo! Name of Aoife, or something. Lord God, these Irish names!"

"For a Welshman, that's good," I said. "Who gets her?"

"Earl Richard de Clare," said Fitz-Stephen, with a smirk. "I'm married."

"What do you get?" St. Erne wanted to know.

She lifted her skirts and thrust the sheathed dagger through her garter.

"Wexford. Not bad, eh? Dermot promised it to me and my brother Maurice."

"It's full of Danes—but it's a good place, if we can get it, and the king don't go back on his word," I said.

"He'll keep his word, all right." St. Erne caressed the sword between his knees. "The way to manage these Irish is to keep 'em in a cleft stick, and never turn your back on 'em."

At that point, Fitz-Stephen's white-whiskered harper, who had been plunking away softly for the last hour or so, lifted his voice in song—not loud, but sweet and lingering, and it rang through my mind long afterwards. What he sang was part of a prophecy of Merlyn's—the old Welsh bard, you know.

"Two-natured is he,
The champion victorious,
Of two bloods the knight
Who shall shed Irish blood
Who shall win the fair land—"

Fitz-Stephen rubbed his nose and looked self-conscious and annoyed. He was of two bloods—Norman and Welsh—and he had every intention of winning himself some land, being poor as poverty—perhaps at the cost of Irish blood. But it's embarrassing to be the fulfiller of a prophecy. He couldn't help it—this harper had glued himself to Fitz-Stephen and wouldn't be unstuck, and he was bent on making his master, who liked a jug, and a girl, and a snarl with the authorities, into a champion like Sir Lancelot, or the like. But that's the way with Welsh harpers. He cut loose again, with another prophecy.

"The spark lights the torch,
The torch lights the pyre
The flames beat against the sky
The world sees it—"

Fitz-Stephen eyed the harper sourly. Then he looked up at the stars beyond the trees, and pulled his moustaches. I wondered if he felt the same shiver down the back as I did. The Bannow rippled by in the darkness, the woods on the distant shore moaned in the night wind. There were so few of us, in this hostile land, and with a little bad luck, it would all be no good, and we would be forgotten bones and rusty shreds of chain mail in a ditch somewhere. I don't think I was afraid to die—after all, I'd seen service in France, and it's a quick death you get in battle, and a decent one and better than rotting of old age and slopping your food down your kirtlefront. But I did feel lonesome and apprehensive, and I *was* afraid of being wounded. For I had seen what O'Gallin's kernes had done after a skirmish, and it wasn't pretty. I thought I'd better tell Fitz-Stephen and the rest, so I did, and they looked uneasy and rubbed their sword-sheaths.

Well, we didn't make any noble speeches. Fitz-Stephen, I recall, said that he hoped it wouldn't rain, and St. Erne answered that he didn't think it would, and then we curled up with our feet to the fire and our swords between our knees—and if some of us had trouble getting to sleep, why, we were full of ale and grub, and an uneasy stomach makes hard sleeping.

We were nervous, all right, but we were going right along.

CHAPTER IV

THE SIEGE OF WEXFORD

DERMOT MAC MURROUGH, the ex-king of Leinster, got to us before dawn the next day. With him rode Art O'Gallin, along with five hundred gallowglasses, and Donall Cavanaugh, the result of an early slip-up of the king's, but a pretty good chap for an Irishman. I see I've forgot to explain what a gallowglass is. It's an Irishman in a fish-scale hauberk, accompanied by a nasty little short-handled axe. And although he doesn't know what training and discipline are, he's a tough customer to meet, and quite different from the local militia—kernes, they call them—who wear the usual yellow shirt-tail, and their hair braided into pigtails and looped up to protect their necks. Kernes toss javelins and hamstring horses in battle, curse their black hearts, but will run like rabbits when things start going wrong for their side, and small blame too, with no armor but pigtails and a wickerwork shield. A gallowglass will stand up and fight pretty well.

Now the Lord knows Dermot Mac Murrough became the worst-hated man in Ireland. Dermot of the foreigners, they called him, and spat when they said it. To hear Irishmen talk, he was the sole cause of our conquest of Ireland. But that's nonsense, you know. He got himself into a tight place, with a gang of personal enemies surrounding him, and he had sense enough to hire professional fighting men to solve his problems for him. If that's a capital crime and black treason, why, there's not a throne in Europe that hasn't got a traitor on it—and that goes for King Henry, too. Mind, I don't say Dermot was any of your lily-white lambs. But if I were Irish, I wouldn't curse him until I'd finished cursing the everlasting senseless quarrels of the other kings and chieftains, including the High King Rory himself. For God knows there were only a handful of us who conquered Ireland, and we were killable, despite hauberks and helms. If the Irish tribesmen had stuck together long

enough, they could have wiped up the sod with us. But just when they'd get ready to smash us, one kinglet would get insulted over something and haul off for home, lifting his neighbors' cattle on the way—and then the rest of 'em would pull out too, and clapperclaw each other all the way home, and the United Army of Ireland would melt away into nothing, and we were still there.

Anyhow, here was King Dermot, big as a horse and got up in the usual chief's outfit of bob-tailed mantle and striped tight pants. I happened to know that under his gilded leather jacket was a good mail brigandine that he'd picked up in France and found handy often. Dermot was in his late fiftiees at this time, but big and lusty, and adorned with a curly red beard almost to the eyes. Art said that he'd been a handsome man in his youth. His eyes were glaring pale blue under shaggy brows, and he had a spread of shoulders that would need to go sideways through the average Irish door.

In the red light of dawn, this apparition charged into the waters of the ford, silver spray flying from the hoofs of his big black horse. Art O'Gallin rode on his left, Donall Cavanaugh on his right—a nervously grinning lad with a downy dark beard and a gap in the middle of his front teeth. You could see the ranks of spears and battle-axes stretching back through the woods, and the sunlight gleamed on fish-scale mail. I noticed that O'Gallin had shed his civilized Norman clothes and wore the same outfit as the others, and looked as wild and battle-happy as they did.

Fitz-Stephen had ridden his horse down into the shallows and sat there extending his big right hand. He looked calm, but his moustaches were twitching like a cat's. The water that flowed past his horse's hocks was blood-red in the sunrise, and I heard somebody behind me gabble nervously to his favorite saint—it did look sinister, for a fact. But Mac Murrough kicked his horse in the ribs, and when he got up to his ally, he wound his arms around Fritz-Stephen and kissed him right in the whiskers. I heard a muffled "Hey!" but Fitz-Stephen recalled his manners, and embraced the king in the same way, while the king poured out a flood of Erse. When he stopped to blow, O'Gallin's voice cut across the echoes: "He says he's glad to see you, and he asks you to lead your forces to the Wexford short. He says Wexford comes first in his collection, because he's going to give it to you and your brother Fitz-Gerald to hold, after it's took."

"Suits me," said Fitz-Stephen, grinning all over his face. "Let's get going. Dyfydd!" He turned to the little Welshman, who stood at his stirrup in the water, clasping something wrapped in his mantle. "Sound the rally!"

Dyfydd drew out a great curved horn with a flourish, and blew three loud toots. They echoed and re-echoed along the Bannow shore, and startled faces popped out of the brush, and hastily withdrew. So we realized that the natives were getting highly interested in us.

WEXFORD is a small burgh on the seacoast, south of Dublin by about thirty-some leagues. The people inside its walls—for it has walls, being one of the few Irish towns so protected—are a mixture of Danes and Irish. They fish and trade back and forth with Bristol and Norway, and plot rebellions against whoever's their lord.

We had barely come in sight of the land gate when we heard an uproar, and here came the population, boiling out of the walls, past the shacks and cattle-pens that clustered on the outside. At once Fitz-Stephen marshaled the battle—the Welsh archers in the middle, all in their neat brigandines, arrows on nock, and the cavalry on the flanks, with Dermot's gang in the rear. It was a big gang too, by now. Some of his rebellious liegemen having heard about us, they had come swarming down on the fold, all full of loudmouthed loyalty.

I was feeling pretty good. I had rolled a few dice with Mountmaurice the night before, and acquired a fancy silk surcoat. I had put in many a weary hour that winter rolling the dice, so his loud cries about being cheated only got him a laugh all around. The cubes were his own, you see. So when I saw this big mob come surging out of the land gate, I felt all breathless and exultant, as if I'd stepped into cold water up to my neck.

Fitz-Stephen bawled an order, and the hoarse voice of Dermot echoed him, screeching an Erse curse, probably. The sun flashed on helms and brigandines, and I thought, here goes, and took a fresh grip on my lance and settled the guige of my shield, my best one, the one with the family crest of the red boar's head, across my shoulder. The trumpet sounded, and we started off at a slow trot, the archers loping along on foot in the middle. The Wexford mob was pressing on blindly, yelling and waving axes and swords. Then they seemed to see us for the first time, and they froze in their tracks. An impulsive archer in the front rank let loose a bolt, Fitz-Stephen swore, somebody yelped, and that did it. They turned, the lot of them, and there were over two thousand, and started for home at a rapid clip. It took the edges of the mob a good time to catch on, but when they did, they outran the others.

By this time we were bucketing along over the fresh spring meadows in pursuit, while the cattle fled bawling in all directions. Not too fast—Fitz-Stephen was too sharp a lad to get caught by a fake retreat. But there was no

fake about it. The Wexford army was jamming itself through the land gate, helter-skelter, upside-down and crossways, using elbows and knees. Flame shot up suddenly from one of the thatch-roofed huts outside the gate, and the sortie was over.

Now that looked like an easy affair—but they were inside, and we were outside, and they had a wall and a deepish ditch. Fitz-Stephen ranged the archers, and ordered them to pick off the parties on the towers. So they did, and tthe towers cleared in a hurry, and we thought we were all but over. We got busy—all of us, except the horse-holders—and filled up the ditch with trash and charred timbers from the burning suburbs, and the scaling ladders went up. We'd worked on them hard the night before, and they were tall, and shaky in the joints as usual. I disapprove of scaling ladders—they won't hold enough men at a time for a good rush, and they are likely to break under you when your mind is concerned with what the folks on top of the wall are going to heave at you. And just when you're ready to grab for the wall-coping, somebody on top gets a pole and shoves, and away you go. A siege tower takes longer to build, but it's a damned sight more efficient.

One reason why I speak so feelingly about ladders is my experience that day. I told Eadmer for God's love hold the ladder tight, and I went up, my breakfast flapping in my stomach and the rungs turning under my feet. I had found a coign of the wall that would shelter me until I got pretty high—I hoped. Frankly, I was scared blue. When I turned my eyes aside, I could see other ladders propped up against the walls, and men swarming up like ants up a grass-blade, and I felt the ladder sway under me with the climbing feet of other men. Also things began coming down. Stones and beams of wood hurtled past our ears, and fell crash at the bottom of the ditch, sending up dust clouds that made us sneeze, and disturbing the poise of the ladders. On the ladder next to mine was Robert de Barri, and I saw him get hit square on the comb of the helmet with a coping stone. He said something in Welsh, and I thought he was all right, but the next minute he had pitched backwards off the ladder and was gone, and the lad below him turned the color of cheese.

I heard Eadmer's voice bellowing from below, "Get along! Get along, dammit! Up! Up!" I thought he was addressing me—guilty conscience, I suppose—and I thought of what I'd say to him by way of rebuke when I got down again. The next moment the ladder gave a sickening lurch, I heard an ear-splitting crack below me, and a howl of terror. Then I was on the way down, still gripping what remained of the ladder, neck and neck with a flying beam of wood, and the next heartbeat, crash! wham! I hit the bottom of the ditch, crossways of the ladder, my feet in somebody's stomach, my head inside my helmet, and that inside a great thick truss of stinking marsh hay . . .

Dyfydd drew out a great curved horn with a flourish, and blew three loud toots.

(End of Part I)

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN MEOLA

DON'T BE BITTER

By

ROBERT H. WALL, Jr.

STINKY has that look about him when he sits tensely beside me on my cot while I clip my nails. I decide to let him sweat because I know he's not going to give until I bat my long lashes at him. Frankly, it's so hot in the Philippines in the dead of the winter, that eyelash batting comes under the heading of Athletics, Group, Compulsory.

"What," I finally ask him, "brings you here in such an obvious condition of upswung hair?"

Stinky cracks his knuckles. "I am in a crisis."

It's going to be one of those milking jobs, I can see. That makes me a little apprehensive. I try silence.

"This time," he hazards the opinion, "it's the real McCoy."

I say "Oh." "Well," I say, just to keep up the dialogue while I go through my socks for salvage.

When it comes, it comes in a blurt that has me suspended in mid-action. I guess you might say that I was galvanized into inaction.

"I own a night club," Stinky says.

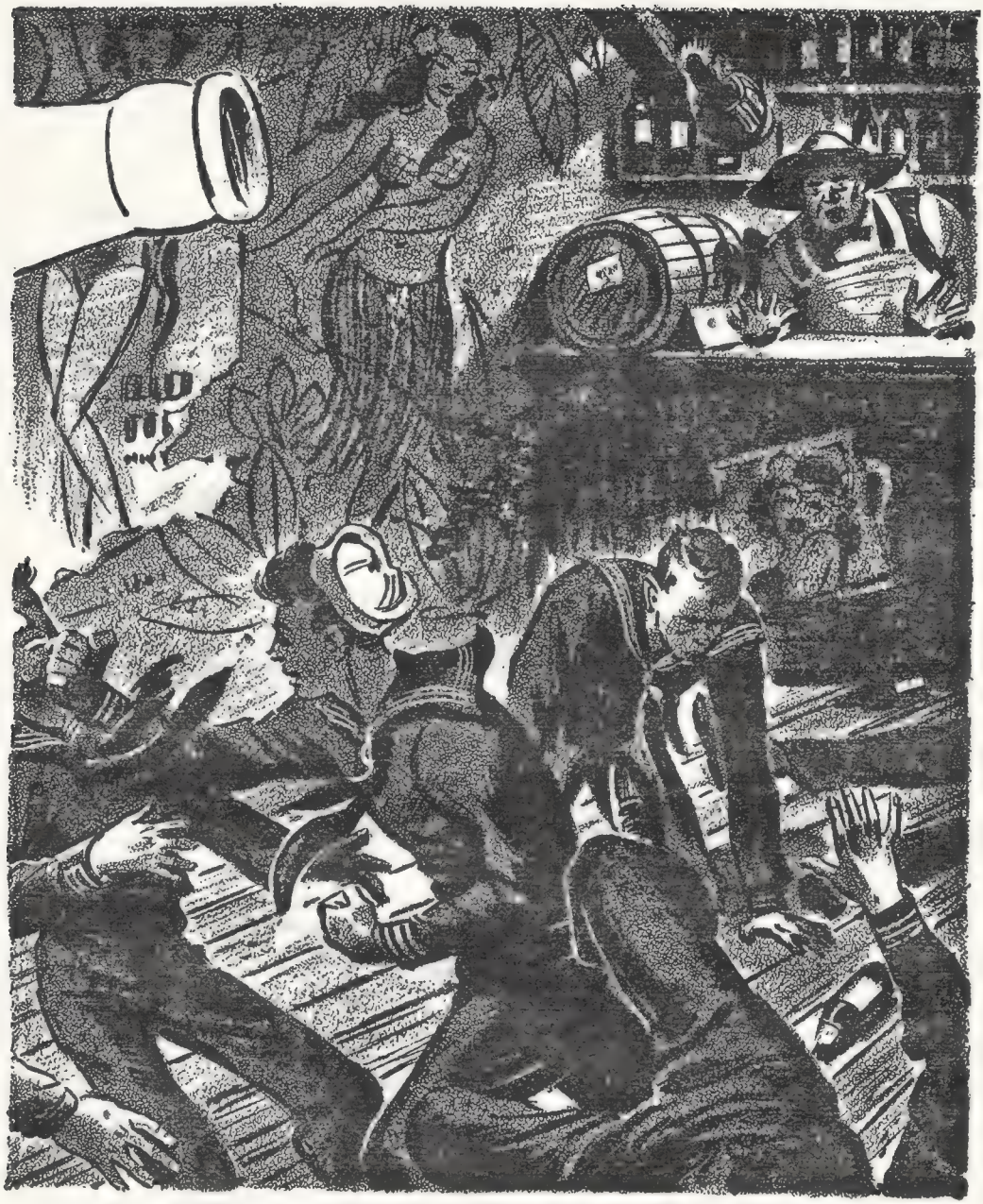
I get it the first time, in spite of the content. "Oh no."

"A night club."

"You only think you do. It's just a passing fancy." I continue pawing over my socks.

"As of last night, I own a night club. Lock, stock, and barrel I own it," he insists.

"What a mad thing to do," is all I can manage. I am convinced he is telling the truth. Things like that happen to Stinky. That is the sort of shocking fact he hurls in your face like crockery. "Where is it?" I ask, visualizing a gaudy, chromium thing left to him by a doting auntie in New Jersey.



"Tacloban, Leyte, Philippine Islands."

I get my mouth closed and open it again to relieve myself of mixed emotions. "But, dear boy, what happens to our little dream of going home together, now that peace has set in, if you wear a big straw hat, soiled whites, run a night club in town here, and become a local character?"

"It must have seemed a good idea last night."

"It's things like this which are giving the resort a bad name, Chum," I tell Stinky.

"Corn whiskey?"

Stinky nods.

I can see where I'm expected to extend a helping hand. It isn't the climate for that, but what's a guy going to do?

"I don't know how it happened. Exactly, that is." Stinky smiles winsomely at me. "But I always say, what are friends for if you can't come to them with your troubles?"

"I'll give that some thought," I promise. "Now tell me all you remember while I put some holes in these dirty socks so I can turn them in for new ones."

It seems that there was a poker party for Staff Sergeant "Gyp" Peters the night before on account he has 180 points and practically talked himself into being sent home for discharge. "All I remember clearly," Stinky explains, "is playing poker and winning and winning. Boy, was I hot!"

"That's a beautiful memory. But you must have spoiled it somewhere along the line. Otherwise you wouldn't be helping yourself so generously to my cigarettes."

"Could you, incidentally, let me have about twenty pesos until next payday?"

I sigh and comply.

"Where was I?" Stinky asks, with new gusto.

"Borrowing twenty pesos until payday, which is exactly one month from yesterday."

"Oh—Well, when I woke up this morning there I was with this awful taste in my mouth, a headache, and this in my pocket." He passes me a much-folded sheet of paper.

" 'Two thousand pesos!' " I am quoting. My eyebrows push my receding hair-line even further back. "Were you ever hot!"

Stinky shudders and plucks at my blankets.

"I'm afraid it's legal," I tell him, returning the paper. "At least it sounds legal. 'For receipt of two thousand pesos (P2,000) in hand, the undersigned Gabriel Peters does. . .' and all that. The New Guinea Club? Sounds festive in a horrible, nostalgic sort of way. Now look, my lad, the thing for you to do is carry your carbine down to see this pig with ears 'Gyp' Peters, and get your money back on account of you being not very bright and practically a minor."

Stinky shakes his head. "Staff Sergeant Peters took off like a big bird by plane for Hamilton Field this morning. He's gone home."

I swallow a few times. "Sergeant, you *do* own a night club. And you so young and all."

"What are we going to do?"

"I don't own anything. I'm just waiting for them to add up the points again so I can go home. I don't believe in real estate. I'd rather rent."

"I thought we might at least go down and look at it," he suggests shyly. "It would be awfully fine if you'd sort of give me moral support."

"Morally," I point out, "you've been receiving a dependency allotment from me ever since the first time we met. O.K. I'll type out a couple of passes and sign them."

WE take the major's jeep, which doesn't have to be turned in to the Motor Pool till midnight, anyway. Besides, while I'm sitting at the typewriter, I figure I might as well whack out a trip ticket for the jeep, too, just to make it entirely illegal. It's a short run into Tacloban from the post. Stinky bounces silently beside me while I guide the brakeless wonder through the maze of assorted obstacles and depressions the engineers have covered scantily with gravel the size of hams and call a road. We park the jeep down near the docks and I chain the steering wheel to the windshield frame in the elaborate, thief-proof device which I invented and which earned me my corporal's stripes in spite of my big mouth which I am always using.

The New Guinea Club, in case you are ever shanghaied and find yourself in Tacloban, is located about half a block up from the docks on something called Calle Douglas MacArthur, between Calle del Revolucion and P Street. That night you could have spotted it easily by the screams of delight and the sounds of the fission of crockery that filled our ears as we walked slowly up the dark street.

"Sure this is the right address?" I ask Stinky. "Sounds more like a branch office of Manhattan Project to me."

Stinky is becoming very nervous and he feels no better when we run into this MP prowling ominously back and forth before the place. We have no way of knowing what a prominent part in our lives this snowdrop is going to play, so we ignore him dramatically and head for the stairs leading to the club.

"Hey, Mac," the MP calls.

"Yes, Sergeant?" we both reply. In unison.

"Where you going?"

"In here—we thought." I give a pretty good imitation of Lillian Gish in "Way Down East," done entirely from memory, which with me is very long in the tooth and beginning to get a bit creepy in the throat. Or was it "Orphans of the Storm"? Lillian Gish, anyway.

"I wouldn't if I was you."

"Wouldn't you?"

"No, Joe."

"May I ask why?"

He swings his white club and teeters. "It just ain't a nice place, Sam. Not healthy."

"Oh, isn't it?"

"No, it ain't."

I bring myself to ask the fatal question. "Off—off limits?" My voice dies in my throat. I can sense Stinky's tension.

"Not," the MP spits into the road, "yet."

"Oh well, then. . ." I chortle. "In that case. . ."

We're halfway up the stairs, clinging to the rail because the whole building seems to be canted at about a thirty degree angle, when Law and Order calls out again, "Hey, Pete!"

I leave Stinky to clutch the rail for support in case the New Guinea Club rolls to starboard, and go back to have small talk with the character in the street.

"Take a hint, Moe." He narrowly inspects a weapons carrier which barrels by just then, leaving behind a trail of fractured song about a department store in Chicago. "Thought that was them. Only they don't sing."

"Them?"

"Yeah. Provost Marshal." He points his white club at the source of the pandemonium which is increasing momentarily. "He don't like what's goin' on in there."

"He don't?"

"Take it from me."

"Oh, certainly."

"You wouldn't want to get picked up in a do-dad." His club is tapping an obbligato on my chest.

"Definitely not."

"Well," the top of the club finds my navel, "I got a hunch there's gonna be a do-dad tonight. Bunch of sailors in there. They always foul it up for the rest."

"Thanks," I tell him. "We'll just nip in and tell them to pipe down and then nip right out again. Hold up any—do-dads until we're out, will you, Moe?"

"Remember," he calls after me, "that I warned you."

I rejoin Stinky. "He thinks there might be a raid."

"Oh, my aching back," Stinky groans. "Let's get out of here."

"Onward and upward," I urge him. "If worst comes to worst and there is a do-dad, we can goof off out the back way." If there is a back way, I add internally.

Stinky wants to know what a do-dad is. That serves as sufficient distraction to allow me to knock unhindered on the door. We are being studied through a peephole by an eye.

"Sergeant Peters sent us," I tell the eye.

There's a clatter of chains and the door creaks open wide enough to let us in and to let out a cloud of smoke. The door slams shut and there we are, surveying the pleasure dome.

I'm not at all nosey by nature, but I always feel that you can't go through life with your eyes closed to certain aspects of the same. And here, I tell myself, is certainly an aspect I've not encountered before. On the floor, amid a clutter of broken glass, four or five or even six sailors are grabbing various parts of each other's anatomy, like legs and arms and throats, and wrestling themselves into a stalemate. One personality, however, is detached from the main group and is carefully pulling the nose of the red-faced sailor who seems to be closest to bottom of the heap. "That," cries the fun-loving isolationist, "is for Isabel in Sydney. And this is for that extra duty in Pearl Harbor. And this," giving a final twist I could almost hear above the orgy, "is for Mother's Day." Then this sadist lurches to his feet and proclaims, "Let's go some place where we can have fun!" He leers into my face as he passes, "Wanna make something out of it, doggie?"

Stinky is standing so close behind me I'm afraid he might get hit if the sailor swings on me and I duck, so I smile and say, bravely, "Certainly not, my friend. Certainly not."

The group is all separated and trying to go out the open door arm in arm. The sailor with the nose is trying to climb over them to get at the tweaker. The door closes behind them.

"It's things like that which are giving this resort a bad name, chum," I tell Stinky. "Let's have a drink on you."

THERE is a sort of bar over against the wall. I just happen to notice that. And then I just happen to notice, too, that there is a human agency involved in opening and shutting the door. Sort of a primitive, Filipino

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version of the electric eye. There's another human agency behind the makeshift bar, who's wearing a big straw hat, pulled down far enough to make holes for the ears almost a requirement for comfort. He's a little man, but quite a little man. I reflect that I bet I know by whom and with what the bottles are opened. He's got the teeth for it. They both look like they're standing by, waiting for a call from Warner Brothers.

"Hello, boys," the bartender grates, shifting the locally-twisted fuse of fuming tobacco he's carrying in his mouth and trying not to inhale the smoke.

We say hello and lean on the structure behind which he waits.

"What'll you have?" I ask Stinky. There's no answer from him so I ask the hat, "What've you got?"

"Black Horse. Five Roses. Four Feathers. And we have imported. Very difficult to secure."

"Imported what?"

"Ween-ston Churcheel. Genuine Scotch. Very strong. Very good. Made in Manila."

"Give us Four Feathers," I tell him. "Doesn't that sound good to you, Jerome?" Stinky still hasn't said anything. I wonder if I hadn't better warn him to talk while he can, before he has his throat cauterized, but I figure he'll take off through a window if I get witty.

"Is very good," the hat tells us, pulling a wad of newspaper out of the mouth of a very dirty beer bottle and pouring a cloudy liquid carefully into two cracked glasses. "I make it, myself, personal. Downstairs. Two pesos."

Stinky pays and I pick up my glass and head for a table under which the doorman has just kicked the bigger fragments of glass and shreds of clothing. Stinky scurries after me, carrying his glass as if it might begin to smoke and seethe any minute.

"Well," I toast, "here's to the future."

When we stop coughing, we settle down to hiccuping gently.

"Hello," I say to Stinky. "Maybe that 'future' thing was a little hasty."

The doorman comes over to our table, pulls up an empty box and leans against me, looking sinister, and giving off what the toothpaste ads keep telling you about. "Hey, Joe." He peers over his shoulder at the far from blank wall on which amateur murals compete with a ragged poster advertising a movie called "Noche de Amor" where a more professional investigation of anatomical divergencies from normal has been made. "You got trousers?"

I'm a stranger here, myself. I look it.

"You have blankets? You can secure? I buy cigarettes, also. I give you best price in Tacloban," he tells me.

"Perhaps," I cagily tell him.

"Twenty pesos for one blanket. High price. Nine pesos for carton cigarettes." He specifies brands. Nothing dull about this fellow. "O.K.?"

"Other prices furnished on request?" I ask him.

His command of English is purely economic, I see. He grins to show tooth fragments, eroded prettily enough to make him a likely candidate for national park status. "Sure. O.K. You bring him tomorrow night."

"Yeah, sure." I nod my head. "You just stick around and hold your breath. If you can hold a breath like that."

He grins even more widely and slithers over to his station at the door.

"Well, little man," I congratulate Stinky, "this is *quite* a property you have got here. Any minute now it will be raided by MP's. And, in addition, if that's just the word I'm groping for, you seem to be operating a sort of black market supreme on the side. You should choose your help more carefully."

Stinky's obviously in a state bordering on collapse.

"Better tell the little man with the hat to charge more than a peso apiece for these soft drinks sold from now on so I can afford to buy you goodies when you are in the stockade." That's me. People wonder what became of vaudeville. "And who, then, will put out the *Leyte Life* each day? Who then will supervise that energetic daily and chaperon it through the beatup mimeograph? Incidentally, that is the only critical mimeograph I've ever seen. Nobody could read Lieutenant Andrews' column yesterday. It just didn't print."

"I know," Stinky sighs. "He was very bitter about it, in a casual sort of way."

"Look. Let's go up and talk to the hat," I suggest. "Leave your drink. If it goes off it won't hurt us over there at the bar." I've got what passes for an idea. "Let me do the talking. I have a way with these people."

The hat regards us without open suspicion. "Hit you again?" He's been picking up a good line of bar English, I see.

"No, please don't. Nice place you got here. You own it?" I'm wondering if Stinky is admiring my subtle approach.

"No. I am not the one."

"Who does?"

He looks me blandly in the eye. "Me," he replies promptly.

"You own the New Guinea Club?"

"No. I am not the one."

I indulge in a tricky question. One that you could use to trap hungry, blind mice with after I'm done with it.

"Who does, then?"

Sure enough. "Me."

"Nice going, J. Edgar," Stinky titters.

"Listen, cobber," I point out to him, "it's your funeral. Remember?"

THERE'S the business of the chains at the door again. We watch two navy officers come in. While the trap is still open, Stinky and I slip past Count Dracula, the doorman, and take the air.

"At least you're getting the carriage trade, too," I say. "But don't let me lull you. I'd be the last person in the world to do that. The way I see it, you've got to get rid of this thousand dollar rattlesnake. And quick. As an investment it's jail bait."

"You sure have a way of getting right at the core of things," he quips.

"You're not being very cooperative," I point out.

He ignores me. "The beauty part of it is that tomorrow's column by Lieutenant Andrews is all about the black market and how it's every G.I.'s duty to help break it."

"Like what, for instance?"

"Like not selling or buying black market stuff."

"I wonder how much the lieutenant pays for his stateside whiskey? Three eighty-five a fifth?"

"He don't drink. I wish I was home in New Jersey."

"There's a clothing shortage. You wouldn't like it."

Stinky moons away. "The war's over. What the hell are we doing here? Fifty points for discharge and the ninety point men haven't gone home yet."

"What's that got to do with the black market?" I ask, irrelevantly.

"I will probably be here the rest of my life. Why? WHY?"

"One worry at a time, chum," I suggest. "Day after tomorrow I'll start work on getting us both home. Tonight we've got to sell the New Guinea Club before things crack wide open. Got any ideas on that? Something dramatic like that last 'Why? WHY?' business for example?"

"I could put an ad in *Leyte Life*."

"Oh, fine! Saying what?"

"I don't know. . . 'For Sale. Cheap.' Something like that?" He looks at me hopefully.

"'Owner Must Sacrifice.' No, my friend! You would destroy yourself if I weren't around to guide you. Your biggest asset is the fact that nobody knows you do own the club. Next, even if the hat finds out—and you really should drop by with a bucket to collect your share of the take if the joint is still there in a day or two. . . Even if, as I say, the hat does find out, he'll knock them dead with that whimsical cross reference style of his." We're driving into the Motor Pool. "That gives us a basis. Sort of pulls things together."

"Sure," says Stinky. "All I have to do is get rid of the club."

"Well, I feel terribly relieved. I don't know why you choose to be so grim about things. We've seen the club. We know the worst. . ."

"Do we?"

I ignore him and go in to turn the jeep's papers over to Lard Kelly who's both on duty and not exactly my favorite enlisted man.

"Good evening, Lard," I purr throatily. "And how are you, laddie?"

It's mutual, I forgot to add. He grunts and snatches the trip ticket from me without tenderness.

"Lard, old boy," I lean my frank and open face, like a vise, over the counter, "I have a hot tip."

He looks at me. One side of his mouth tilts up into what I guess you'd call a half smile. It's only half there, anyway.

"Knowing you as a cagey customer with the old peso, and as one who is prominently on the financial ball. . . Well, it just so happens that it has come to my attention—getting around the way I do—that the super New Guinea Club in Tacloban is for sale. Dirt cheap."

"That," he snarls, "I can believe."

"Well," Stinky opines as we walk back to the company area, "that should give you a rough idea of how it's going to be. The only way to swing it would be to get people drunk enough to buy it and then take off for parts remote in a plane."

"Impractical," I promise him. "Nobody could get that drunk *again*." I don't mind calling your attention to that statement. If it has any italics in it, they are mine.

As we part I point out that at least we now have something to occupy our minds besides sex, When Are We Going Home? and the weekly twaddle at the meetings of the NCO Club.

I am thinking of a variety of things, flat on my back beneath my mosquito bar, when the cogs start clicking. It all gets into line. About three in the morning I go to sleep, feeling like I've just invented electricity.

"Goodbye," Stinky says to me next morning when I rush down to corner him at the Special Services hut.

"That's something new in greetings."

"It just came over the radio that men over thirty-five are eligible for immediate discharge."

I hang onto myself with both hands to keep from being too joyous, because I figure that, under the circumstances, it would be vulgar. When I come down to earth and get my addled wits disentangled enough to pass for normal, I clutch Stinky to my heart and declare, "Now I can really enter into this project with a free and singing heart. I have, dearest Jerome, the answers to all of your problems. A little fantastic and complicated, but all wool and ever so washable and fluffy after. Where is Lieutenant Andrews?"

"Down at headquarters chewing on the general's ear. He thinks he ought to be discharged."

"Well," I suggest, "smarten up and come with me to Tacloban. I have taken the liberty of screwing off with the Old Man's jeep again. We shall seek out a certain MP and start the mills grinding."

We go through our regular routine of Stinky standing stock-still and asking questions and me being elusive and not quite answering any of them entirely. Inevitably I intrigue him into the jeep. He looks thoughtful as I map out my campaign which is to include the cooperation of the Base MP's, possibly G-2, and certainly the NCO Club. General Eisenhower I have decided to leave out, but I'm holding him in reserve because I figure he can be put in later for production value.

"The only hitch," I point out, in summing up, "is that you stand to lose some dough in the deal." That makes me a little nervous, knowing how large such hitches loom with Stinky, but I am happy enough to be honest and I'm finding it another one of those aspects I mentioned earlier.

"I don't care," Stinky says, girding his loins almost audibly. "All I want is to get rid of the New Guinea Club, even if I don't exactly make a profit."

I give him an ovation.

"Except," he adds as if I were his Fairy Godmother and he wanted to crowd as many clauses as possible into his three wishes, "that I want to go home."

That saddens me, too. Here I am, with the Golden Gate Bridge practically passing over my head, and Stinky is just another property owner in Tacloban. "They can't do that to us. We'll think of something. You can't tell. Perhaps this coup I am planning will dramatize you, or something. You might even get some more points out of it."

"I might also become thirty-five overnight from worry," he suggests.

WE drive down to the docks because I figure that's where my favorite MP is apt to be. He isn't, but the guard on duty tells us where to find him.

We ask for Sergeant Gillycuddy, as instructed, at the Base MP area, are directed to his tent, and find him sleeping muscularly on his back.

"Let's come back later," Stinky suggests. "He looks awful rugged."

"Musclebound," I diagnose. "We can outrun him." I reach out and tap his shoulder.

Sergeant Gillycuddy is the type that wakes up churning the air with his fists. Stinky and I back away and watch him subside to the point where he's scratching his ribs which give off a nerve-racking sound like a slate blackboard it seems to me. He glares at us, then recognizes me. "Why, it's Pete. Sit down. What's on your mind, boy?"

"Are you—quite awake?"

"Sure."

"Well, then there's no harm in telling you that Fame is knocking on your door."

"No kidding." I can tell by his expression that he's casting Lana Turner in the role of Fame.

"First, though, tell us how old you are?"

"Thirty. Why?"

Stinky and I exchange happy glances. He'll be around for awhile. We've got a selling point. "Look. We are going to help crush the black market. Jerome, here, is editor of the *Leyte Life*. You know the *Leyte Life*, Sergeant? Well, no matter. . . . You must be weary of trudging the docks of Tacloban night after night, hearing the sounds of revelry and never being able to participate therein, yourself. Well, we're going to fix all that. After your gallantry and bravery in tonight's affair, your obvious executive ability will be recognized and you will reap the fruits of success. This here thing we've doped up is bucking de luxe."

"Tonight?"

I see he's still 'way back there and I've got to fill in the blanks for him. I do so.

"Oh no!" he says, when I'm finished.

But I have my trump card to play. "Besides the glory and the sure promotion involved, I have one case of beer in the jeep outside which bears your name."

He runs his tongue over parched lips. "That makes sense."

We have him. Just to make sure, I let him run over the plan of action as outlined. He's brighter than he looks. We shake hands over it and let him carry in his case of beer. When we leave he's sitting on his cot, scratching his ribs loudly and crooning over the bottles.

"In less than three hours you will no longer be owner of the New Guinea Club," I tell Stinky. As the minutes pass I keep varying the time element. It's a handy sentence.

I'm drunk with confidence when we go to the NCO Club meeting that afternoon, all unaware that here is where we're going to strike our first snag.

Comes the dramatic moment when I spring the happy surprise that the New Guinea Club is available and means an end to their fruitless search for a place to hold parties and such. I summarize briskly, "I am in a position to handle all arrangements for the deal. The owner, who wishes to remain anonymous on account he feels your expressions of gratitude might prove embarrassing to his modesty and he just wants to do something for us men, has appointed me as his agent in all transactions. I'd like you men to mull over this really beau-

tiful opportunity and make your decision right away because I happen to know that the Red Cross and Base Officers' Club are both itching to buy the building." I sit down, confident that I've got them where they live. We've been trying to find a spot for our club outside the post for six months without success, and that's the second thing I happened to think of the night before.

Out of the resulting hubba-hubba comes one voice crying to be heard. I turn a smiling face upon Lard Kelly who is waving a pudgy arm and demanding the floor in rich, parliamentary tones, "Mr. President. Mr. President."

"What do you suppose he wants?" I ask Stinky. "Maybe he's going to put it in the form of a motion. Good old Lard."

Good old Lard gets the floor. I'm leaning over the back of my chair beaming at him. "Mr. President. Here's the thing. This deal, like the corporal calls it, stinks. Deal is right, and if ever there was a pair of dealers it's him and the sergeant sitting next to him. Not to bring personalities into it or anything, but I think everybody knows what I mean and who I'm speaking about in reference to." I can't turn my beam off, but it means about as much as a sunlamp with a busted globe. "The sergeant, as it happens, is the modest guy who owns the club. He paid two thousand pesos for it to 'Gyp' Peters night before last and all of you know what 'Gyp' Peters was like, too. Not only that, but these same two dealers tried to sell me the club last night. And furthermore, the only people that would touch it with a ten-foot pole are the Base MP's and I've got it from a very reliable source that they are going to raid it and put it off limits. Well, that's all, except that it is a firetrap and—very dirty."

"If," I tell Stinky on the way out to chow, "I knew where there was a fence, I could write some very mean things on it about that Lard Kelly. Why, he made you and me sound like furtive people."

"Looks like we laid an egg there," he admits. "Are you sure this thing tonight is a cinch?"

"Don't lose confidence just because one little phase of our plan has gone wrong. Look on the bright side. I'm not licked yet. Tomorrow your name will be on everyone's lips."

Stinky flinches as a couple of jokers coming out of the meeting call to him and want to know, "What d'ya hear from the mob, Scarface?" and "How's business, Capone?"

"I'm not doing so bad right now," he says.

"Keep your mind off your troubles. Get to work. Nip over to the office after supper and start writing the big story for tomorrow's *Leyte Life*. Keep calm, above all else. The steady hand. The clear mind. . . ."

"I'd feel much better if you'd take some of the credit for what's going to happen tonight," he muses.

"Don't give it a thought. I am only interested in your welfare," I insist.

WHEN I pick Stinky up in the jeep that evening he's in fine fettle. It seems that radio they've got down there has just picked up an announcement from San Francisco that all non-essential men are going to be sent home immediately.

"Lieutenant Andrews told me," he crows, "that if ever he saw a non-essential soldier, I'm it. Isn't that the pay-off? I think he was trying to insult me."

We laugh happily together, make plans for what we are going to do, what kind of suits we are going to buy when we have our discharge papers clutched in our hot little hands, and what we are going to say to any officers who stray into our palatial offices pleading for jobs as janitors.

"I knew we'd be going home together, old boy. Didn't I tell you that something would happen?" I ask him.

I park the jeep in front of a warehouse down the street from the club and whistle softly. Sergeant Gillycuddy comes out of the shadows and walks across the street.

"Everything is O. K.," I tell him. "Stinky will

hide in back under those blankets. When I come out with this character who's going to be doing the buying, you just saunter out of that doorway over there and arrest him. I'll wait until he's handing me the money. Then I'll say, loud enough for you to hear, 'Not enough.' Don't move out of that doorway until you hear me say that. Stinky, meanwhile, as soon as he hears that, will pop out from under the blankets and grab him from behind. Then you two will turn him in. Get it?"

They both agree.

"Why do I have to hide under the blankets?" Stinky wants to know.

"Why do you always have to wait until the last minute to ask questions like that?" I want to know. "Do you or don't you want to cooperate? Well, crawl under those blankets then."

"All I ask is that you hurry up. I'll be smothering."

Gillycuddy and I tuck Stinky in the cramped space behind the front seat and cover him thoroughly with blankets. I take off for the club where joy is being practically unconfined again, I hear. I'll admit that I'm a little bit excited. Things like this don't happen every day. But everything is under control and I've remembered everything, I think. That's how my mind is working, trying to figure out why something keeps gnawing at me like the vague feeling that you've left the gas on and the lights burning, when I realize that the eye has been peering at me through the aperture in the door. "Sergeant Peters sent me," I tell him. He lets me in.

The bar is crowded. The tables are crowded. There are a few people on the floor, too. Maybe they're dead. I give a jerk of the head to the doorman. He slides up close. "Outside," I mutter, "I've got a dozen blankets down the street in my jeep. You buy?"

Breathless motions to me. I follow him behind the bar. He holds open a door. From the smell that's wafted up I gather that Four Feathers is made down there. He follows me down a short flight of stairs. On second thought, I decide that they keep snakes down there. I hesitate. The push he gives me isn't gentle. I'm lucky there's only a few more steps to go before I land in a heap of cast-iron and wooden boxes. The latter are crushed to kindling when I hit them. But just then I'm not interested in building a fire. I'm sort of peeved at Breathless, whose attitude isn't quite matey. "What's the big idea?" I ask. I think there's a slight echo down there. That's the only answer I got. Then I notice that the door at the top of the stairs is closed. My legs are a bit numb from my fall, but I go up mostly two stairs at a time until I'm bumping against a door that won't open. It doesn't take me long to figure out that I'm locked in. I make fists and beat a regulation tattoo on the cracked panels. It raises a fine cloud of dust, anyway. Nothing else happens. "Hey!" I yell. "Let me out!" I beat some more. I can barely hear myself above the community sing that's going on outside. I try my shoulder against the door. It collapses and I do another one of the falls I am rapidly becoming famous for.

"What's the matter with you?" the hat wants to know as I pick myself up. I don't wait to see where he lands when I push him backwards to get him out of the way. I hear breaking glass as I leap out and fumble the chains off the door. Everyone is still singing lustily, "Be Kind to Your Friends in the WAC's" as I run down the stairs and hit the sidewalk just in time to catch the wink of the jeep's tail-light as it flashes around the corner.

"Gillycuddy!" I yell as I run. "Gilly-CUDDY!"

I peer across the street and catch a flash of white helmet in the doorway.

"You dumb ape," I rave at him.

He comes out. "What's eating you, chum?"

"He's stolen the jeep. I forgot to lock the chain on it. Stinky's in there with him. Why didn't you stop him?"

"You said . . . I thought . . ."

I'm dancing in the streets of Tacloban. "Do something!"

He does. He commandeers a weapons carrier that comes down the street at that crucial moment. We jump in back. "Follow that jeep," Gillycuddy tells the driver.

"What jeep?" The driver is reasonably confused.

Gillycuddy pushes him out of the driver's seat and makes a great uproar with the gears. I manage to slide outside and stand on the narrow running board so I can see where we're going as Gillycuddy settles his differences with the transmission and hurls us into the night. We haven't got quite enough speed to turn over at the corner.

The road is clear ahead as far as I can see. There are no sidestreets for about half a mile, but there are plenty of them just before you leave town and head for the airstrip.

"They won't be able to get out of town," Gillycuddy yells. "The boys on duty at the station check everybody and they'd spot him right away."

Stinky, I'm thinking, while I hang on. They'll murder him.

At the MP checking station on the outskirts of town I'm ready for hysterics. The jeep hasn't passed there. We do some quick turning that has me closing my eyes. I guess the driver has gone into shock. He just sits there holding the windshield away from his face or vice versa with one hand, saying nothing.

Suddenly, I see it, caught briefly in the glare of our headlights as we rush past a side road.

"There!" I yell.

In the excitement we swerve and crunch through something that sounds like human bones but turns out to have been a bamboo pig pen. He gets us back on the road through a squealing mass of fresh pork which miraculously escapes death.

"There's a blanket lying on the road." I point it out to Gillycuddy. "They must have gone down the road."

WE slow down and peer from side to side as we cruise down the narrow alley. There's no place to hide even a roller skate, until the headlights pick out where the alley goes blind in a square littered with refuse. We cut the motor and Gillycuddy and I get out to prowl, leaving the speechless driver rooted to his seat, still holding the windshield.

"I didn't do anything back in town," Gilly whispers to me, "because you said wait until I heard you say . . ."

" 'Not enough.' I know."

So, having taken care of the Story Thus Far department, we creep down the dingy street toward the square, hugging the buildings. That is, Gillycuddy hugs, so I follow and hug, too, figuring that he is an expert in such things. We come to the corner. He pokes his head around.

"Psst," Gillycuddy hisses.

My head comes around the corner, too. I follow his pointing finger with my eyes. There's a tumbled-down shed at the end of the square. It's the only place the jeep could have been concealed. And, in addition, it has a big double door in front to help along the processes of elimination.

"Shall we," I suggest, "send back and get reinforcements?"

"Ha!" he exclaims and whips out a forty-five that looks big enough to handle mortar shells in an emergency.

"Ha," I agree. "Is it loaded?"

He scoffs. "Let's go."

"I hope we're not too late," I say, conjuring up visions of strange, Oriental tortures which culminate in a long shot of Stinky in a rapidly-closing Iron Maiden. I don't know what she's doing in my visions, I'll admit, but that's what I see. We creep up on the barn while I'm having these visions. There are no windows, but a beam of light pours through a knothole like a searchlight. Gillycuddy puts his eye to it. He gasps and removes his eye. I push him aside and duplicate his performance. We hurl ourselves through the door we find on the side of the building.

Stinky is facing us. He smiles. "Come in, gentlemen." He transfers the tire iron to his other hand and hefts it once or twice in the direction of two cowering natives and the doorman who are babbling in assorted dialects. "Take over, Sergeant," Stinky says, as cool as a mango, to Gillycuddy. "I see you're armed."

"Stinky." I clap him on the back. "Good old Stinky."

He suffers my embrace rather grandly, it seems to me. "It was really nothing. Only it's lucky I was sitting on that tire iron back there." He motions toward the jeep.

"Were you scared?"

"Not a bit."

Gillycuddy herds his captives out the side door. He's going to take them in the weapons carrier. We are supposed to follow in the jeep. That barn is filled to the rafters with G.I. stuff. There's even a stolen 6 x 6 truck they've been working on. The serial numbers and all other marks of identification have been painted out, and there's a new color job started on it to cover the O.D.

"This is even more sensational than I thought," I exult as we wrestle the doors open and drive out.

"Don't forget to pick up that blanket I tossed out at the corner when we turned," Stinky reminds me, loftily. "I suppose if it hadn't been for my presence of mind, you two'd be running around in the night yet."

I concentrate on driving behind the weapons carrier.

"I don't like to rub it in," Stinky continues, "but I always did think that plan of yours could be improved upon."

I don't say a word.

And during the next three days I don't get a chance to. If I wanted oblivion on the deal, that's what I got. Big chunks of it. Stinky's so busy seeing generals and Filipino officials that I only catch glimpses of him from time to time until, one afternoon, he careens into my tent again with that look on his face.

"Hello," I say, trying to crowd down all of the cutting things I could say about fair weather friends and the like.

"Tragedy," he tells me, "has struck."

At the same time I'm saying, "In case you're interested I'm leaving for the 28th Depot tomorrow. On my way home. The orders came out today."

He caught the last part of it, anyway, because his speech was shorter than mine. "I'm on orders, too."

That melts me. "I knew we'd catch that boat together." I start pounding on him. Something is wrong. I cease beating and step back to take a look at him.

"My boat," he states, "goes to Tokyo, Japan. Only it's not a boat, it's a plane. And it leaves tomorrow morning, early."

I can't think of anything to say except, "What happens?"

"I'm suddenly essential. I am now a staff

(Continued on page 145)

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFER

COMCOMLY AND THE KING GEORGE WOMAN

By

NARD JONES

Captain Black bowed low before the startled savages. "Plenty more spirits on big fire canoe," he said.

DID you ever know a one-eyed king with a pot belly and an ambition to marry a goddess?

Well, I did.

His name was Comcomly, and he ruled the roost out along the lower Columbia River in the Northwest part of the New World. A blasted Chinook, he was, but he was top savage and we all had to jump when he whistled, whether we were white or red. I'm told that Washington Irving, that American writer, has written a book in which he mentions the old reprobate. But Irving got his material from the Northwest Company men in Montreal, whereas *I* was right there at the time Comcomly raised all the fuss. Besides, I hear that Irving doesn't mention Jane Barnes at all, but I could be wrong. I don't read these upstart Colony authors. Matter of principle.

Jane? She was a barmaid right here in The Spotted Dog. A lass with a quick full lip and tinted hair, and she used to wait on those tables there in the corner. Fact is, she met Donald McTavish at one of those tables. But that was some years back, about the time we were having trouble with those blasted Colonies again.

As for me, I was there because I had given up the practice of medicine in London, given it up to see the world. Maybe you heard it was

liquor that caused me to give up medicine. You can think what you like and be damned to you, sir! God's truth is that I was merely bored. I got tired of looking at the furry tongues and bloated stomachs of females who ought not to have eaten so much. Needless to say, I was thinking also of my country, for I shipped out on the *Racoon*, a British sloop of war. Possibly you have encountered the rumor that I had been having a spot of grog with her captain, that I awakened in the forecastle to find the *Racoon* at sea. That is a canard, set afloat to delude the public and besmirch my name.

We had nine days out when Captain Black of the Royal Navy said to me, "You are appointed ship's physician. In that capacity I shall confide to you our mission. We are to capture Fort Astoria and take possession of it in the name of His Majesty, the King!"

"The King!" I said, and raised my own cup of grog, first to the King, and then to my lips. We were in the captain's cabin at the time. "As ship's doctor," I said, "I feel constrained to tell you, Captain, that you do not look well. I prescribe another mug of grog, and I do not mind telling you that I do not feel too well on my own account."

When he had refilled the mugs I said, "And where is Fort Astoria?"

"In Northwestern America, Doctor. It lies about twelve miles inside the mouth of the Columbia River."

"Twelve miles?" I said. "That is a mouth worth mentioning."

"A wide, deep mouth," the captain said. "Much like your own."

"But hardly as dry, Captain." I shoved my empty mug across the table.

He ignored it. "About five fathoms is what Captain Gray mentioned in his log after he had discovered the river. There are no charts."

I remembered that Gray was an American and said so. Black nodded. "That is why we are going to take Fort Astoria. An American named John Jacob Astor has established a trading post there. If the Colonies should succeed in repelling us on their Atlantic Coast they make wake up to find the British flag flying in their back yard."

"Let us drink to that," I suggested.

Since I made that historic voyage I have examined what charts there are, and I must confess that, considering the distance, the time passed very swiftly indeed. Looking back, it appears to me that much of that time was spent in Captain Black's cabin. I know, without doubt, that we sailed south and west from Portsmouth, and certainly we rounded Cape Horn. I recall rather clearly that we replenished our stores and made some repairs to the *Racoon* at the Sandwich Islands. There is a drink there, made by the natives from the fermented juice of the cocoanut that. . . .

But I digress.

Leaving the Sandwich Islands, we bore north and east for the Columbia River. I remember that about six days out of the islands, I found myself staring across the table at the rather vacuous expression on Captain Black's face. He was dejectedly toying with the ribbon of his wig. The wig was on the table. I heard him say, "Doctor, it looks as if we shall have very little trouble at Fort Astoria. It disappoints me. I had rather been hoping for a fight worth our while."

"*Any* fight is worth our while," I said. "The smaller the better."

"Bah! At the islands I learned that Astor has ex-Northwest Company men running his post. The Northwest Company is Canadian. They are sure to be more sympathetic to the British cause than to the American. They may not fight at all."

"I will face that possibility like an Englishman," I said. "How did you find this out at the islands?"

"You can learn the happenings anywhere in the Pacific at the islands," the captain told me. "It's the crossroads of the western world. You would have learned as much, too, if you had not spent so much time up in the hills."

I told him that I had learned a great deal already and that much of it had been of no use whatsoever. "Perhaps," the captain said. "But suppose I told you that while you were studying the odd customs of the Sandwich Islanders—particularly as to refreshment and females—suppose I told you that Jane Barnes sailed into the harbor and sailed out again?"

"Jane Barnes? Not the Jane in The Spotted Dog."

"The same."

"Then I would say that you were crazier than you look, Captain Black. And without your wig you appear very much out of your mind, indeed."

"Nevertheless, I did see Jane Barnes. She was on a chartered ship, the *Isaac Todd*, and she's headed for Fort Astoria, too!"

"But what in God's name is she doing in this part of the world, and why is she headed for Astoria?"

The captain slapped on his wig, impatiently and crookedly. "I imagine that Jane would be doing the same thing in this part of the world that she was doing in her home port of Portsmouth, except that would not be carrying tankards. She is in the protection of one Donald McTavish. He's a Northwest Company man and related to one of the big factors in Montreal."

"In that case," I said, "we can put about and return to England. He must have orders to take or buy the post for the Company, and if there are Northwesters already in charge it

shouldn't be difficult for him. Besides, haven't they got a head start on us?"

"That they have. And they've twenty guns, too, and enough cannon ball for a line of battleships. But with that mongrel crew—and the *Todd's* a stubborn packet—we'll reach Astoria before them."

"We should drink to that," I suggested. "The less grog on the *Racoon,* the lighter the draft. The lighter the draft, the more swiftly we reach our destination."

THE captain seemed to follow this logic without trouble, and I spent the remainder of the trip almost entirely in his cabin helping him to plan the strategy of our attack on Fort Astoria. We were hindered in our planning by our lack of intelligence about the location and strength of the enemy. But our enthusiasm remained keen and our general plan was not affected. Our general plan was merely to come alongside the fort and let them have a broadside. Then, wind and tide and current permitting, we would bring her about and let them have another.

"And by the beard of Neptune," Captain Black would cry, "that ought to fetch them!"

But he could not help worrying about our lack of information. It could well be, he said, that the wily hirelings of John Jacob Astor had received reinforcements from inland. They might pretend that the broadsides had been effective, then ambush our marines with a superior force. At length he decided that we must somehow do some scouting before the *Racoon* landed her boats.

"You would be the ideal man for the task," he announced one afternoon in his cabin, and there was a disturbing glint of decision in his bloodshot eyes.

"Captain," I told him, "I am not without courage. But the success of our mission is too much at stake to send ashore, as a scout, a man who has had no experience in such enterprises. A man who does not see too well, whose hearing is defective, and whose wind is lacking. A man somewhat past his prime and much too fat. A man—"

"Who in the hell are you talking about?" Captain Black demanded.

"I am talking about myself. Furthermore," I told him, "I have kidney stones. My liver functions only half the time, and then not perfectly. I am a physician and I should know."

"The only thing wrong with your liver is that it is white," the captain roared. "Doctor, you will go ashore first—disguised as a native, as a savage. You will determine the strength of the trading post at Astoria and report to the ship."

"Why not one of your officers, or a member of the crew?"

Black pounded his mug on the table. "It will be you! I do not like to admit it, but you possess a certain intelligence. A degree of intelligence that I have not yet observed in any of my officers and certainly not in any of the blasted crew. As for the marines—bah!"

I saw that I was to be the scout, that he would have no other. "Captain," I said, "I do not mind doing it, for my country. But I wish you would go with me."

"I?" he said.

"Yes. You are a man of courage and intelligence, like myself. If there were two of us, not only could we see twice as much, but it would make a great impression upon your men. They would realize that you were quite willing to expose yourself to the same dangers as must confront them. And," I said, very slowly, "such an expedition would look very fine indeed in the log of the *Racoon.* Your superiors would find such an entry most interesting. You know, it is on such things that sometimes. . . Why, I can easily imagine you, First Lord of the Admiralty."

"Come, come now, Doctor," said Black, straightening his wig fore and aft. "Remember that I am a man of the sea, not a lubberly nincompoop to be blown this way and that by drawing room flattery. But the fact is, I had in mind going with you all along. I was merely testing your own heart. But, of course, I shall not disguise myself."

"Why not?"

Captain Black drew himself to his full height, and if you will forgive me, it was a very full height. "I am an officer in His Majesty's Navy, as you know. I do not intend to go about in the habiliments of a savage—and of an American savage at that!" He swung his sword around so that it hiked up his tails, and he looked a little like a blue and gold rooster. "No, *you* will disguise yourself as a native. I will accompany you, in the uniform of the Royal Navy. If we are approached, I can withdraw. But I think it very likely that we can obtain our information without being apprehended."

A sudden uncomfortable thought struck me. "Captain, how do you know what the savages at the mouth of the Columbia look like?"

"My dear Doctor, as an officer of the Royal Navy I have studied the journals and reports of the Colonies, as well as of the war with France on the New World continent. They are replete with descriptions of the red tribes."

Replete the journals may have been, as the captain said. But there is about as much similarity between a Columbia River savage and a red man of the Massachusetts seaboard as there is between you, sir, and a Hottentot! I was to wish I had known this before I left the deck of the *Racoon.*

When we had coasted north along that

rugged Northwest shore and come abeam of the great River of the West, I could have sworn there was no river there. All I could see was what appeared to be an unbroken line of breakers, but this was undoubtedly the torment at the bar. Black thought we were wrong, too, and spent a good quarter hour cursing his navigator. But the Columbia was there, all right. And many a sailor better than Black had been fooled by it.

Soon we saw from our masthead a passage between the sand bars, so we bore away and ran in northeast by east, stemming a strong ebb tide. I thought Black was going out of his mind. The lead showed four fathoms, then ten, then five, then thirteen, and then four again. It looked to me as if the *Racoon* stood a good chance of heaving herself on a bar and being left high and dry for the Astorians to capture, instead of the other way around. But at last we got clear and set a course to southward along the shore, with Black sending up the maintop gallant-yard and setting all sail. And just at dusk we came to with the small bower.

On either side of the wide river there were forests of thick green, but no sign of habitation. The fur post, Black said, was just beyond us around a promontory, but there was not much conviction in his tone. The *Racoon's* carpenter had been there before, and he added to our worry by saying that when he was there last the ship had been approached by dozens of native canoes. But we saw nothing on the whole great width of stream, some five or six miles. I popped out my eyeballs with a glass but I could see nothing along the shore, although I had a distinct feeling we were being watched.

So did Black, and he did not like it. "Doctor," he said, "you must get ashore within an hour. I want to know what goes on here. Come below!"

I followed him into his cabin with the mate, and there I went through a most humiliating experience. My head was shaved except for a thatch of hair running north and south from the nape of my neck to my forehead. It did no good to protest. I was on a sloop of war in time of war. Besides, the captain held me while the mate went to it with shears and razor.

But this was not the crowning ignominy. A band was tied around my head and a feather attached thereto. I was then stripped half naked and the carpenter painted me in the most outlandish colors. When the captain saw that I was resigned to my fate he let me go and lay back on his bunk and howled with laughter. I could stop his mirth only by reminding him that he had promised to go with me.

"Jove!" he said, sitting up and straightening his face. "Quite so." He took a stiff beaker of grog and adjusted his epaulette. He took another beaker and studied me from feather to bare painted feet. "Perfect," he said. "Absolutely perfect."

"The breech cloth is too damnably tight," I pointed out. "My stomach hangs over."

"Let it hang," Black said. "There must be fat savages, just as there are fat Englishmen."

"I don't doubt it. But I will wager you they wear breech cloths to fit comfortably."

Finally the captain relented and let the mate loosen the hemp. This allowed me to pull the outlandish gear up over my navel, a navel which, I must admit, is not a patrician affair. I also managed something else. Under Captain Black's pillow I had perceived a half-hidden bottle of spirits and when the mate loosened the hemp I slipped the bottle into the seat of the breech cloth.

It was thus that I lowered myself into a boat, but not before the captain, fully accoutered in his uniform, even to the sword, and wrapped around with a great muffler, had preceded me. The river was rough, and it was not comfortable sitting on the bottle of spirits. There was a good deal of spray as the boat pounded, and my paint got streaked. Some of it may even have washed off.

CHAPTER II

CHIEF OF ALL THE CHINOOKS

WE PUT into a little cove in darkness that seemed to weigh down on our shoulders. Black ordered the boat to stand by until our return, which he planned would be not later than an hour before dawn. If we failed to return, the boat was to return to the *Racoon* and carry out the captain's orders. These orders were succinct but difficult. "Find the fort and blast the hell out of it. Then every last man come ashore fully armed and release the Doctor and me."

"Or," I said, "give us a decent burial!"

Black and I did not proceed through the woods for two reasons. It seemed almost impenetrable, and we were afraid we would lose our way. On the narrow beach we could at least follow the river. Or we thought. The bitter fact was that we could hardly follow our noses.

This was because of my feet. I was barefooted, and I had not tried to walk without boots for forty years. The captain and the mate and I had not thought of this. And now I found that the river beach was not a smooth expanse of cool sand. It was paved with pebbles and small rocks which nature seemed to have put there expressly for the purpose of lacerating the soles of tender human feet. Moreover, there were clam shells. Not

whole clam shells, but shells broken into fragments by the tides and currents and the shifting pebbles. I could not proceed more than a dozen yards without stopping, and it was all I could do to keep cries of pain from escaping my lips.

Although the captain was booted, damn him, he could proceed no faster than I. He showed a marked reluctance to go on ahead of my tortuous progress, and I confess that I did not want to be without his company.

Half an hour passed and we could not have been more than a stone's throw from the cove at which we started. "Dawn will catch us before we have discovered the fort!" groaned Black in a whisper. "In the name of Neptune's trident, why aren't your feet tougher than a baby's!"

"Let me have your boots," I rasped back, "and we shall see how swift *you* are. God knows you have not been sober enough during the entire voyage to get them off, and I warrant your feet are as tender as blisters. Why can't I go back to the cove and borrow a pair of boots from one of the boat's crew?"

"Good Lord, no! Who ever heard of a Northwest savage in a pair of seaman's boots? If you were caught with them, your disguise would not be worth a farthing—and your life still less."

Well, we went on like that most of the night. Dragging a few yards, sitting down while I rubbed my feet, and arguing in whispers. How we got to the promontory I will never know. But get there we did, and then we saw the clearing in the woods and the darker mass which was the bastion and the fort of logs. As we worked closer we saw lights through the chinks in the enclosure wall—and, unmistakably, we heard sounds of carousing and celebration!

"Damnation!" said Black. "I should have landed our whole force. We could have surprised them without a shot and avenged that trick Washington managed on the Hessians across the Delaware. Damnation and double bloody hell!"

I never saw a man so angry and frustrated, but there was nothing we could do about it. One thing was certain. Astoria did not know of the presence of the *Racoon,* and the celebration no doubt explained the absence of native canoes. The factors were getting the Indians drunk so as to loosen up the trading for furs. I had heard about this practice in The Spotted Dog, listening to bloated factors on a visit from Montreal in Canada.

"There's still a chance to catch them when they're sleeping it off in the morning," Black said. "We'll attack at dawn. Come on, let's get back to the ship!"

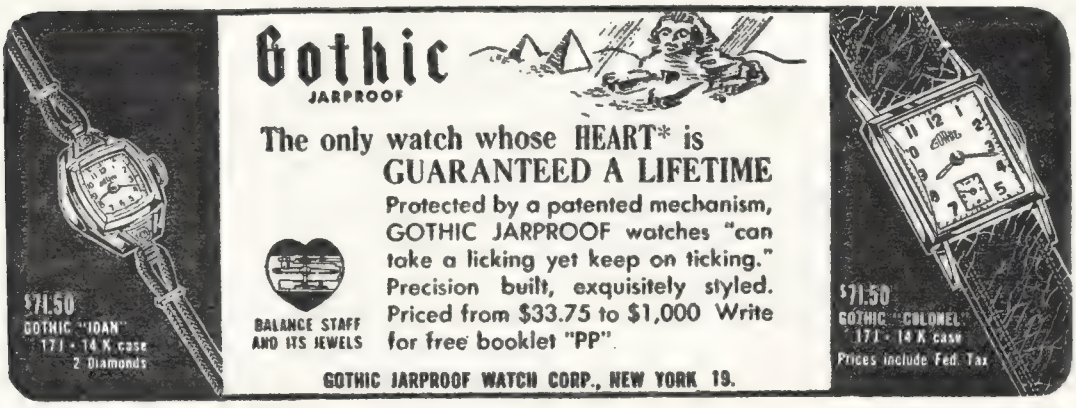
That was easier said than done. My feet felt as if they were in ribbons. More to the point, we had been gone from the cove longer than we realized. I had struggled back only a little way when I saw pink-gray streaks over my shoulder.

"Captain," I said, "the *Racoon* isn't going to attack at dawn, because dawn is just about upon us."

"Salted brimstone!" exclaimed Black, glancing at the sky. "Now we've *got* to hurry, because if we don't get back to the cove by dawn they'll take the boat back to the *Racoon* and order the attack without me!"

He began to run in the darkness and I stumbled along after him as best I could. And then, suddenly, we both halted dead in our tracks, because someone had shouted behind us. When I had stopped shaking I ran on a little way and bumped into Black. "What was that?" he croaked.

The shout came again. It sounded like no language I had ever heard. I couldn't tell how far away it was because it had a strange guttural quality. And then before I knew it there were two people running at me. I heard Captain Black dive into the brush, but I do not mind saying that I was so petrified I could not follow him. Even had I not been, my poor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feet would never have allowed me to spring away with sufficient alacrity.

In the growing light, then, I saw what I was encountering. Or, rather, what was encountering me. I have never seen two human beings like them since, and I never expect to. And most certainly I had not seen anything like them before that chill morning by the side of the River of the West.

"Comcomly, me!" one of them said, and pounded his chest. "Comcomly, chief. All Chinooks."

As I say, I had never seen such a creature. His head was flattened in the front, sloping back from the bridge of his nose at a sharp angle so that his head, thinly covered with black oily hair, seemed to come to a peak. One eye was closed, and I observed that it was closed permanently. The upper part of his body seemed scrawny, but his middle was made up of paunch upon paunch—not less than three of them. Suspended from around his neck by a string was a conical hat of straw, and I remember thinking that it must fit very snugly on that peaked head. He had on a jacket made of rat skins and a skirt of thin strands of wood bark. His big, ugly feet were wrapped in animal fur and his dark skin was grease from head to foot.

The other one was similarly attired, and it dawned on me slowly that this one was female. A glimpse of heavy breast behind the open rat-skin jacket, and the thick long hair were all I had to go by. Certainly there was nothing feminine in the face. It had the same unhappy features as those of Comcomly and it was considerably battered and scratched. Both of the savages were standing rather uncertainly and I detected a strong smell of spirits in the morning air.

Also, I began to feel damnably uncomfortable. If these were Columbia River savages then the set-up which Black and the mate had wished on me certainly did not jibe with what they had on. I resembled Comcomly only as to paunch, and I had only one to his three. My head was shaved but not peaked, and while I shivered in the dawn in a breech cloth, he seemed very snug in his skin jacket and bark skirt and surface of grease.

"COMCOMLY, me!" he said again, in a deep guttural. He pointed at me. "You." I gathered that he had identified himself and expected the same courtesy of me. I grunted out some gibberish, a mixed-up palaver called "pig Latin" that I had last spoken as a boy on the streets of London. I wanted him to think that I was a savage, but a foreign savage, so to speak—one of a branch of his race that had wandered. But the chief of all the Chinooks did not seem to be satisfied.

"Comcomly," he said angrily, beating his thin chest again. Then he jabbed the woman. "La Blanche. Best wife, me."

If that was his best wife, sir, I did not want to set eyes on his second best! I tried the gibberish again, with gestures to indicate that I had come from far across the mountains.

It did not work. Suddenly Comcomly fixed me with that one terrible eye and said, "You Boston man?"

I knew then, for a certainty, what my disguise was worth. He had not been fooled for a minute. As far as he was concerned, I was no Indian, and what he wanted to know was whether I was English or American.

"You King George man?" he demanded, before I could answer the first question.

I had a theory that when one is in doubt one should hedge a little away from the truth. So I said, "I am Boston man."

Obviously it was the wrong answer. Both Comcomly and La Blanche made angry guttural sounds and the old chief said, "Boston man not belong here. Boston man all gone." He gesticulated toward the post. "All King George man now," he said.

At that moment I got a whiff of spirits and with it came an inspiration. I reached down into the back of my breech cloth and brought out the bottle. The effect was enormous—just the effect of the bottle itself. But I wanted to prove something else. "See here," I said, pointing at the label. "I am really King George man. Not Boston man."

"You lie with tongue," said Comcomly, but there was no venom in his gutturals now, and his eyes were glued to the bottle. I tapped the label. It said *Devshire's Empire Quality*, but I knew the old devil could not read. What I wanted him to see was the British flag on the label. He peered close in the dawning light and then straightened, looking at his best wife. "King George man," he said.

I took out the cork and handed over the bottle. He grabbed it with an enthusiasm that would have done justice to a white man. In his eagerness to transfer some of the contents into one of those three paunches, he spilled a good deal on his chin and chest. His best wife wiped it up with her fingers and licked them thoroughly. This had to do her until at last he relinquished the bottle to her grasp. In deference to a lady, I must report that she did not spill a drop. She shoved the neck of the bottle so far down her ugly throat that not a drop was wasted.

When this little ceremony was over they regarded me with kindlier eyes—with three kindlier eyes, to be precise. "You got more?" inquired Comcomly. His English was, I perceived, entirely sufficient for his more pressing needs. And at this moment Captain Black dashed out of the bracken like a blue and

gold bird. He had seen and heard that the crisis was over and now he bowed low in front of the startled savages, so low that his sword upthrust his tails and La Blanche was delighted. I am not sure to this day that the noise she emitted was a giggle, but I rather believe that it was.

"Plenty more spirits on big fire canoe," said Captain Black. He turned to me and added swiftly, "Let's get them to the ship. They can tell us what goes on at the post."

As soon as Comcomly was certain that the *Racoon* carried spirits, he was happy to accompany us. Captain Black ushered the two ancient bags into the boat, and later onto the deck of the sloop of war, as if they had been royalty of the first water. And of course, in that part of the world, they were just that. It began to sift into my brain that I was witnessing that special charm and deference with which only a member of the British Navy can treat members of a race which he privately believes to be inferior. There is no other protocol quite like it on earth, and I had never suspected that the captain was a master of it. Yet what astonished me more was that Comcomly and La Blanche not only liked it, but that they took it for granted!

When we had them in the captain's cabin it required only another bottle of spirits to discover why it was not then very healthy to be a Boston man—an American—in those parts. The post had already transferred from the Astor Company to the Northwest Company and was operating under the British flag! Duncan McDougall, the old Northwester who had been operating the post for Astor, knew that England and the United States were at war. He knew that an armed ship, like the *Racoon*, might pop into the river any day. So he had done Mr. Astor a favor by selling him out before the fort was captured. He had done the Northwest Company a favor by buying for a few cents on the dollar. And he had done himself a favor by remaining as head of the post. It was a nice arrangement, but it infuriated Black when he had dragged the story out of the chief.

"Damn McDougall!" he yelled.

"McDougall good man," insisted Comcomly thickly. "Good Boston man. Good King George man when time come."

"The blasted idiot has made a nincompoop out of me, that's what he's done!" the captain shouted. "I sail around the world to capture a bloody fort and find that a blasted fur trader has just *sold* it out!"

"McDougall good man," repeated Comcomly persistently. "He my son. He marry Princess Little Necklace. My son now."

Black collapsed onto the bench in front of the table and stared, open-mouthed. "And married the chief's daughter to boot!" he whispered unbelievingly. Then he pounded the table and stood up. "By Neptune's breeches, I'm going to take that fort formally! I'm going to put the marines on parade and raise the flag and take that fort—and all the surrounding country—in the name of the British Empire and His Majesty, the King, as I was sent to do, and be damned to Duncan McDougall!"

Well, that was what he set his heart on, all right, and there was no stopping the captain. He ordered me to clean myself up, shave off what hair I had left, dress myself and go ashore at once. I was to present his compliments to Duncan McDougall and advise him that Captain Black would take over the Astoria post at four-thirty that afternoon.

WHEN McDougall got over his surprise at seeing me, and had adjusted himself to the sight of my white pate, he seemed to me to be a very likable man. He was tall, broad in the shoulders, and not unhandsome. He wore his buckskins like a man who has worn them all his life, and I could see that so long as he was in the great woods he would be a good man to know, no matter if one were an Astor or an Englishman.

We had a spot of grog and some most excellent smoked salmon together. Smoked salmon is a great delicacy, but it tends to give a man a thirst beyond normal. It was served to us, I noticed, by a young female savage who was not at all repulsive despite the fact that she had the sloping forehead which I had noticed on all the natives in the enclosure. Neither did the fish oil with which she was lavishly covered seem to detract too much from what I might term a natural charm. I am quite certain that it was not McDougall's grog which enhanced her in my eyes, although—being a medical man—I am quite aware of the fact that spirits increase a woman's beauty when those spirits rise behind the eyes of the male beholder. But it is definitely an untruth, a despicable slander, that I myself wedded three of the Chinook tribe during my brief sojourn along the Columbia. This black libel may have grown out of the harmless fact that, on certainly not more than one occasion, or at most two, I took occasion to—

But again I digress.

This young woman who served smoked salmon to McDougall and me was Little Necklace. She was Mrs. Duncan McDougall, a princess of royal blood, and the daughter of (oh, difficult belief!) Comcomly and his best wife. When she had left us alone I thought it only polite to mention her winning way.

"Yes," McDougall said. "She is my wife. She is the chief's daughter, and since you are a man of the world I will tell you that I mar-

ried her for political reasons. But," and here he sighed, "she is a comfort as well."

"No doubt, no doubt," I said.

"But soon I am afraid the situation will be a problem."

"How a problem?"

"Donald McTavish is on his way here to check up on things for headquarters at Montreal. And I have been advised that he brings a white woman with him."

"That is a fact," I assured him. "We encountered them in the islands."

McDougall spread his big fingers wide. "You can foresee the trouble. As things stand now, the chief's daughter, as my wife, is first woman of the post. When McTavish arrives, Necklace will have to step down in favor of the Barnes woman. Comcomly will not like that, and what he doesn't like, his people do not like. They may refuse to trade, which is the least harmful possibility. More than that, they may become warlike. We let them carouse last night in the enclosure, hoping to get them a little more friendly. But the spirits do wear off."

McDougall looked at me and laughed. "So you see, Doctor, when you say that Black wants to take over the fort in a ceremony, that is a small matter. I haven't set eyes on him, but he must be a booby. Nevertheless, he's welcome to take over the fort ten times over if it will salve his ego and help get him command of a fleet. My real troubles begin when McTavish gets here with Mistress Barnes."

"I understand she will be the first white female to set foot on the Northwest coast of America."

"Aye, that she will be. And a troublemaker, I have no doubt, as that kind usually is. Bear in mind, too, that my men here have not seen a white woman in all of three years. Some of them longer than that. And we are not all Scots here. There are French-Canadian voyageurs, a volatile band, as well as some Sandwich Islanders brought in to handle the boats. Thank God the Americans have sold out and gone! They would be worse than all the rest."

He stood up. "But you must excuse me. I will get the men ready for the arrival of your eager captain. I'll hoist the American flag which flew over the fort when Astor owned us. Black can have the pleasure of replacing it with the British flag."

"You are a thoughtful man," I said, "and I will drink to your thoughtfulness. With all your troubles, you are a thoughtful man, Mr. McDougall."

There was no doubt that Duncan McDougall saw troubles ahead, and clearly. But the biggest trouble to be encountered when Jane Barnes set foot on shore he did not foresee at all. Nor did I, although I have been called astute.

None of us, in fact, foresaw it. And meanwhile the fort was too busy getting ready for its formal and bloodless capture at four-thirty in the afternoon of—if I recall the date correctly—December 12th, 1813.

The *Racoon* came upriver and stood off the fort and let go a salvo of salute into the stream. When I heard the cannon I knew at once that not only Captain Black, but the entire crew, must be primed tighter than the guns. It was a great day, and it was, in addition, nearing the Christmas season.

When I saw the small boats coming across the river toward us I was more certain than ever that the *Racoon* and its men were in a gala mood. No question but what it was necessary to tack against the strong current and tide of the Columbia in order to make shore. But such tacking as took place that December on the Columbia was never seen in the smartest regatta for the King's Cup. McDougall was eyeing it all through the glass as we stood waiting on the bastion. "One thing," he said. "It looks as if they may not make it."

But he was not so fortunate. The *Racoon's* party landed. First came Captain Black in his newest uniform, accompanied by his two lieutenants, each of whom held firmly to one of Black's elbows. Then came the ship's marines, their black straws glistening from the spray, their pigtails taut as bow strings. Astern of them was the crew, as motley a gang as you would ever hope to see from a sloop of war.

Finally came the most awesome sight of all. It was Comcomly and La Blanche being rowed grandly in a boat of their own. The old chief stood uncertainly in the bow with his arms folded. He was not wearing his coat of rat skins. Instead, he had on one of Black's discarded uniform jackets and, despite its open front, he had apparently decided that such a brave costume did not require his bark skirt. But the coat did not quite complete his attire. He wore one of the captain's dress hats, and on Comcomly's peaked head it was actually whirling in the wind!

The marines, I decided, were either sober or stupefied. They marched straight toward the bastion, in perfect formation, as pretty as though they were drilling on the *Racoon's* deck, and ranged themselves on either side of the flagstaff. McDougall started down the beach to meet the *Racoon's* party, and I followed along with the muttering French-Canadians, the dour fur traders, and the scattering of chattering Sandwich Islanders.

AS THE two men faced each other everything fell silent but the wind in the wet green trees and the continuous sound of the big river going down toward the sea. I heard McDougall boom out then, "Welcome, Captain

The old chief stood in the bow with his arms folded. He had on one of Black's discarded uniform jackets and, despite its open front, he had apparently decided that such a brave costume did not require his bark skirt.

Black. The doctor has given me your message, and the fort is at your service. If the Northwest Company—"

"Silence, sir!" Black yelled. He reached behind his tails and took out a scroll of paper. This he held a little above his head, and he shouted against the wind, "In the name of His Majesty, I hereby . . ." He hiccoughed and started off again. "In the name of His Majesty, I hereby take this fort and the surrounding land, and I declare it to be the property of Great Britain." Then he glared at McDougall stupidly, as if he expected to be challenged.

Nothing happened, however, so he let the paper snap into a roll and handed it to one of the marines. Seemingly from out of nowhere came a bottle of Madeira which was handed to the captain, and as the flag of England went up on the staff he dashed the Madeira against the painted pole and cried, "I christen this establishment Fort *George!*"

By now he was quite overcome with spirits and excitement. The ranks of the marines opened just enough to allow him to back through, then it closed up again quickly. Whether in honor of the bloodless victory, or to cover the confusion of their captain, I could not tell, but they raised their muskets and let go a thundering volley. Captain Black kept on backing up until I thought he would land in the river, but at last his polished heels encountered a large rock and he sat down suddenly and stayed there.

The retirement of Captain Black left McDougall a little nonplussed. Like the rest of us, he had never been present when the British Navy took over territory and property in the name of the King, and so he was puzzled. He did think to turn around and lead the men of Fort George in three lusty cheers, but when that was done he was stuck again.

He need not have been concerned. Comcomly, King of all the Chinooks, indicated that he felt called upon to address the fort and the ship's company. I cannot say whether it was the excitement of the occasion, the grog inside his three paunches, or his uniform, which moved him to speech. Perhaps it was all three. In any event, he elbowed La Blanche impolitely to one side and staggered toward the clearing at the foot of the flagstaff. I noticed that the men of the post were discreetly attentive, and I gathered that it would not pay even to allow oneself so much as a smile at the aspect of this wrinkled old savage so filled with liquor and the sense of his own importance.

"I am Comcomly," he said, as if we did not know. "I am chief of all Chinooks. I make words from me, but I make words from all Chinooks, too. Comcomly is happy that Fort George man come for trading. They give richer gifts for the furs. My people will work harder now for furs." The old goat raised both his skinny arms in the blue and gold uniform. "Soon I know that other King George men are coming in big fire canoe. I know they bring King George woman, pale of face and with hair like the sun. Comcomly marry this princess from the country of King George men. There will be children from both our races, and then King George and Chinook shall be stronger friend than ever."

There was an exclamation near my ear, and I discovered that Duncan McDougall had joined me in the crowd. "That idiot, Black, must have told him about McTavish bringing the Barnes woman!"

I smothered a chuckle. "She'll swiftly change his mind about marriage," I whispered.

"I'm afraid so."

"You're *afraid* so? God in Heaven, man, do you mean you'd want even as unprincipled a brat as Jane Barnes to have Comcomly for a husband?"

McDougall motioned for silence. Comcomly had stopped speaking. "I'll have to give him an answer on behalf of the post," he said. "Meet me in my quarters in the enclosure afterward."

When I met McDougall in his quarters after the ceremony, I saw that he was genuinely disturbed. "Of course, Comcomly had to know sometime that McTavish was bringing this woman. But if I thought Black had encouraged him in this marriage idea I'd gladly slit his throat." McDougall looked at me. "I grant you McTavish is a fool for bringing her, but he's high in the company and there's no helping that. But don't you see the devil of it? Jane will be horrified, and McTavish won't like the idea much, either. Aye, he won't. Then Comcomly will be insulted. And why shouldn't he be? He's royal blood in these parts. The Chinooks have a caste system, you know. They think themselves better than round-headed people, and they make slaves of round-headed Indians when they capture them. I considered myself good enough to ask for a flat-head in marriage, and Comcomly gave her to me. So there, you see, will be Comcomly's logic."

"I think I do see."

"That's not all. The Chinooks around here haven't been any too happy with this post. All John Astor gave us to trade with was a lot of cheap trinkets. He kept the best trade goods for his Russian-American trading. So the savages here haven't been too pleased. McTavish is bringing some better trade goods on the *Todd*—but he's bringing trouble, too."

Just then the door flew open on its leather hinges and an excited Sandwich Islander gesticulated wildly at McDougall. "Big ship coming!" he announced in a high pitch. "Big sail ship coming up river!" McDougall stood up and looked at me with tired eyes. "Aye, Mc-

Tavish is bringing trouble, and damned if it isn't here already!" He made for the door, and I after him.

CHAPTER III

THE KING GEORGE WOMAN

THE ceremony had broken up and every last man was down at the river's edge, both the *Racoon's* company and the post. The *Isaac Todd* was in the river, all right. She was letting her canvas slip and coming to anchor in the lee of the *Racoon*. Already a boat was being lowered. As McDougall and I ran down toward the river he called out to a competent looking Scot, "Get a bottle of spirits, MacDonald, and wheedle Comcomly and La Blanche away from here."

"Aye, Dunkie—where'll I take 'em?"

"Anywhere! Just get them away right now."

I puffed after him to the river's edge. The Columbia had begun to look ugly, the way it will sometimes and suddenly. It had turned dead gray, to match the sky, and there were dirty gray whitecaps making up all the way across and as far as we could see toward the bar. The wind was swifter in the treetops and we had to shout against the banshee noise.

The boat from the *Todd* began to have hard going of it, and it was obvious that the fellows at the oars were not helping themselves too much. They weren't accustomed to combination of wind and tide and river current. I heard McDougall call for men to stand by with a line, for it was plain that the boat's crew would have even more trouble when they struck the tricky eddies along the bank.

I could see there was a woman in the boat, but even in that wind I swear I could hear her before I could make her out clearly. She was not frightened. That much was plain from the tone I heard broken off and flung at us on gusts of wind. She was angry.

At last the boat came close enough to take the line. The woman was in the bow and the line struck across her shoulder. She squirmed out of it, and looked angrily toward shore. The other passenger was not angry. He was obviously scared—a large, fat man whom I took to be McTavish. He was clinging to the gunwales with both chubby fists, paying no attention to the woman, the boat's crew, or to us fascinated onlookers on shore. He was paying the strictest attention to his life, and apparently at that moment he believed it could be best prolonged by clutching the gunwale and keeping his fat seat on the bottom of the boat. It had been a wet crossing and a bad one, and McTavish showed it. So did the woman, but her angry defiance made up for her appearance.

Her blond hair was wet and bedraggled, and what had once been a very fancy bonnet—certainly too fancy for these surroundings—was now a wreck. Her blue gown, which seemed more suited to an evening at the opera than to these wild regions, had lost all semblance of its original shape. But the shape it had taken was not displeasing. The wet bodice was plastered to her heaving breasts, and the skirt caressed hips which certainly had never been seen on the female Chinooks of the lower Columbia.

The boat's nose had hardly touched the bank when she sprang out like a tigress. She stood there with her blue eyes aflame, her thin nostrils dilated and her comely arms akimbo and she called us everything and every name she had ever heard in The Spotted Dog—together with a few she must have picked up elsewhere. We stood with our mouths agape.

"You gangly-livered fools," she cried. "You bloody fools! Were you trying to cut me in two with that rope or were you trying to drown me?"

Duncan McDougall took off his fur cap. It seemed a strange gesture for him. It had been years since he had found it necessary to show respect for a woman. "No, lass," he said, "we were trying to keep you from drowning."

"And a hell of a way it was to be keeping me from it!" She turned to her protector, still squatting in the boat. "McTavish, get out of there and come ashore and make these clumsy monkeys find me a place to dry off and change."

To our astonishment, McTavish responded at once. He made his way forward in the boat and clambered up the bank. When he was in front of Jane Barnes, she let fly at him some more. "So this is the kingdom I am to be queen of?" She tossed her head toward the log fort and the dripping trees. "A kingdom all my own on the far side of the world, you said! You're a fat liar, McTavish, and I'll make you pay for it! Where are my quarters?"

McTavish turned helplessly to McDougall. He was trying to muster some authority in his tone. "McDougall," he croaked, "where are Mistress Barnes' quarters?"

I saw McDougall's jaw drop. It hadn't occurred to him to make a place ready for the woman. "Donald, the truth is I didn't expect you so sudden, and—"

"Sudden?" screamed McTavish, aware that he was under Jane's baleful glare. "I wrote you from London, did I not? The letter came overland from Montreal. Don't stand there and tell me you never got it."

"I got it, Donald. But, you see, it's been so long since I have seen a white woman that I didn't think to remember she would need—"

He was interrupted by a short laugh from Jane. But there was no mirth in the laughter.

"Mr. McDougall," she asked, "what are the best quarters in the post?"

McDougall reddened. "Why—why, mine, I suppose."

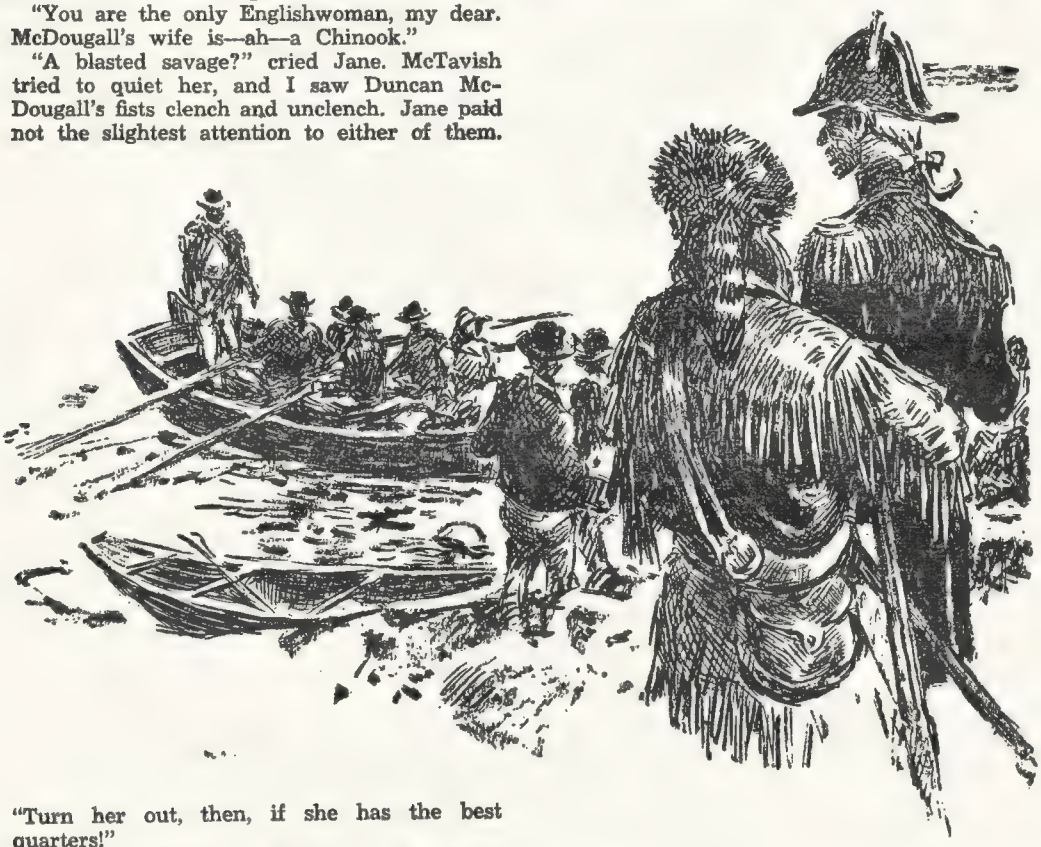
Jane turned to McTavish. "Then we'll take those, McTavish!"

It was McTavish's turn to blush. "But, Jane, my darling, McDougall is a married man. We can't just turn him and his wife out and—"

"Married? I thought I was the only woman here." Her eyes were suspiciously wide and her handsome mouth grew thin.

"You are the only Englishwoman, my dear. McDougall's wife is—ah—a Chinook."

"A blasted savage?" cried Jane. McTavish tried to quiet her, and I saw Duncan McDougall's fists clench and unclench. Jane paid not the slightest attention to either of them.



"Turn her out, then, if she has the best quarters!"

Donald McTavish looked up at McDougall like a hound dog which is both puzzled and frightened. And Duncan McDougall took compassion on him. "You're head man here now, Donald. You can take my quarters." With that he turned and led them up the hill toward the fort.

I helped McDougall move his gear. I don't know where Little Necklace was, but I hoped she was far away. I had the feeling, though, that she wasn't. I kept feeling that she was watching all this from somewhere in the crowd or in the bracken around the post. I felt sorry for her and even sorrier for McDougall, but I didn't know what to do about it.

As soon as his stuff was out, Mistress Barnes flung herself inside. She ordered up her trunks —there were five of them!—and a tub of hot water. Then she slammed the door in our faces.

Silently, McDougall and McTavish and I walked to the long hall where the voyageurs slept and ate. There we began to share a bottle of spirits, and presently Captain Black, no doubt led there by the odor of strong liquor, came to join us. He did not look much healthier, but at least he was on his feet again. "By the beard of Neptune," he said to McTavish, "what a wench! Has she been like that the whole voyage?"

"Worse," said McTavish. "I should never have brought her."

"That is a masterpiece of understatement," I remarked.

McTavish told me sharply that he had not requested my opinion, then added thoughtfully, to none of us in particular, "I have not had a moment's peace since we left Portsmouth. First she was angry because we had no milk and eggs on board the *Todd*. She didn't want them to eat, but to make a paste for her complexion. Finally, at the Sandwich Islands, I got her some cocoanut milk and some birds' eggs."

I could see there was a woman in the boat, but even in that wind I swear I could hear her before I could make her out clearly.

"Did that fix things?" inquired Black solicitously.

"It did not. She became bored. She wanted me to have a sailor flogged every day. When I refused, she threatened to throw herself into the sea."

"You should have let her," said McDougall unfeelingly. "What else?"

"The mate spied on her when she was taking a bath in her tub and she shot him through the shoulder with a musket. He was willing to consider that he had got what was coming to him, but the next week she began taking tubs on deck, in sight of the whole crew. Naturally the mate grew surly and he almost led the ship's company into mutiny. I tell you, gentlemen, she is a hellion."

"Well," said McDougall slowly, "there is more to come. Our friend, the captain, has seen fit to advise Chief Comcomly that Mistress Barnes is to be with us. And now Comcomly has an idea that she might become his bride. The idea of a white wife has intrigued him, Donald. You see, he already has several red ones."

McTavish spluttered. "That's preposterous!"

"You mean the fact that he has several red wives?"

"Certainly not! I mean it's preposterous that he wants to marry Jane."

"Not to Comcomly," said McDougall placidly.

McTavish looked about the long rough hall uncomfortably. "But, damn it, I thought that once you had bought the post from Astor's men you would have things your own way. I thought you would have built some of the comforts of civilization, and that certainly you would not be subject to the whims of the savages."

McDougall smiled at him. "Donald, I'm afraid most of your fur trading has been done at company headquarters in Montreal. If it had been otherwise, you wouldn't have brought the Barnes woman along."

Captain Black gazed speculatively at the ceiling. "Well, now, McDougall, I can sympathize with Mr. McTavish. I can see his line of thinking. As a sailor, I have spent most of my

life at sea, and I have often thought it would be pleasant—"

He was interrupted by a commotion outside the voyageurs' hall and we rushed to the doorway. Comcomly was there!

THE king of all the Chinooks was not in Black's discarded uniform, nor was he in his rat-skin jacket and cedar-bark skirt. Comcomly wore a long and really handsome robe of otter skins. Moreover, he was attended by two round-headed savages whose build and cast of face showed them to be of another tribe than the Chinooks. Each carried a basket.

"Good Lord!" breathed McDougall. "He's in his royal robe, and he's brought slaves with gifts. Do you know what that means? It means he's come for Jane Barnes!"

McTavish turned white. "Send him away! Send the fool away!" He stepped out the door, but McDougall grabbed his shoulder.

"Donald," he whispered, "Jane has got to see him. I think we can put him off, but she's got to see him. If she refuses he'll be insulted and that means trouble."

"Let the damned savage be insulted!" McTavish cried.

Duncan McDougall gripped his shoulder even harder and spoke in a low clipped voice. "McTavish, if we hurt Comcomly's feelings it means the end of this post. If we escape the savages—*if* we do that—it would still mean the end of the post. They wouldn't trap a skin for us if he tells them not to. Not for all the trade goods we could bring from England in a hundred years. How would you like to report back to the company that you had ruined this post by bringing a female companion with you?"

McTavish gulped into silence. It was obvious that he would not like to make such a report at all. As we stood there in the doorway, the dour Scot called MacDonald ran up, breathless. "Dunkie, I tried to delay the old ram. But for once he wasn't interested in rum. All he wanted to do was get rid of La Blanche and get his king's clothes on to meet the woman."

"That's all right," McDougall said. "This had to come, and it might as well be now." He turned to Donald McTavish. "Donald, go to my quarters and tell Barnes she must hurry up with her prettifying and meet Comcomly. And tell her whatever happens to keep her mouth shut—if she can. I'll speak for her. Hurry, now!"

McDougall shoved the reluctant fat man away and walked toward the chief. The old man's one eye was gleaming with expectation. His three paunches looked almost dignified in their covering of otter fur. He was exuding brotherhood and fish oil. "Comcomly come to tell King George woman she shall be his queen," he said. "Queen of all Chinooks."

Duncan McDougall bowed low. "We are honored, Chief Comcomly."

"My slaves bring gifts," Comcomly said. "Where is she?"

"I will show you," McDougall said, and with the greatest deference he led the way toward his quarters. Of course, Black and I followed, but we were not alone. The whole post, as well as such of the *Racoon's* company as were sober enough, moved in a respectful half circle around Comcomly and his two attendants.

When McDougall stopped before the door of his quarters, Comcomly asked, "King George woman there?"

"Yes, Comcomly."

The one eye darkened suddenly. "She take place of Princess Little Necklace?"

"Not in my heart," said McDougall. "The white woman only uses my lodge for a little time." He knocked on the door. There was no direct answer, but we could all hear Jane's strident voice inside, and McTavish's cajoling one. McDougall knocked again, more peremptorily.

Slowly the door opened and there stood Jane Barnes. She had put up her hair and touched her cheeks with color. She wore a bright red dress and new slippers of a brighter crimson peeped out from beneath her full skirt. Every man of us in the enclosure caught his breath. It was like one vast, concerted sigh. It was like the sudden sighing of the wind in the tops of trees, and then silence. I cannot say how beautiful she was, for the memory plays tricks and I am not a young man. But in that place and to those men she was beautiful beyond all women they remembered.

Even Comcomly, for all the assurance of his royal blood, was given pause. But not for long. He stepped forward and raised his sharp chin. "Comcomly, *me!*" he said, tapping his otter robe. "King of all Chinooks. I bring gifts to you." He pointed to the baskets. "I bring two slaves. In my lodge across the river are many more to wait on you."

Glancing nervously toward Jane, McDougall addressed the chief. "Comcomly, you do us honor."

The old man seemed annoyed at the interruption. "I come to do more honor than I have yet spoken. I come to offer Comcomly as husband of King George woman!"

McDougall spoke quickly. "That is not possible, Chief Comcomly. This is more than King George woman. This is a goddess of our people. She cannot marry mortal man. She cannot marry either a Chinook or a King George man or a Boston man, or any man of earth."

That one eye of Comcomly's did not seem to be filled with belief. "I do not think you speak truth, McDougall. You have said there is only

a God for you, and that there is only One. You have said nothing of a female god that is white."

"If you think I speak with lying tongue, Comcomly, look at her. Can you believe she is a mortal female?"

I am certain McDougall would have got away with it if at that moment Jane had not put her hand to her mouth and, so help me, *giggled!* She giggled like a schoolgirl, like any little female Chinook pinched on the behind, and I heard McTavish whisper frantically from back inside the doorway, "Stop it, you fool!"

The truth was that Jane could not stop it. She was trying—but it was not in her to hide her feelings in the way of a lady of quality. She not only kept on giggling, she suddenly burst out into hysterical laughter.

Comcomly stepped backward. The wise old buzzard looked sharply at McDougall. "That is the sound of a mortal woman," he said. "Is she laughing at me because she wants a young man? Is it that she believes an old man cannot be stalwart?" And before any of us realized what he was up to, old Comcomly had yanked a cord and let the otter robe slip to the ground, and there he stood, naked as a jaybird and vain as a peacock, pounding his chest with both fists! He pounded so hard that his three paunches jiggled.

Jane Barnes let out a scream and fainted dead away inside the door.

Slowly the door opened and there stood Jane Barnes. Comcomly stepped forward and tapped his otter robe. "Comcomly, me!" he said.

MY doctor's instinct brought me to her side, but it was plain horse sense that made me knock away the cup of water with which McTavish came running. I stood up in the doorway and turned to Comcomly and the crowd. "Chief Comcomly," I said, in the deepest tones I could muster, "the goddess has left her mortal body. She has gone to the land of the King George spirits to ask if they are angry with you."

If you do not believe that a red savage can grow pale you most certainly were not at Fort George that day. The old Chinook snatched up

Spears and arrows were knocking Racoon *marines off their perches with alarming regularity.*

his otter robe and staggered back, his eye fixed fearfully on the inert form of Jane Barnes. I stepped down beside Duncan McDougall and whispered, "For God's sake, get her out to one of the ships before she comes to!"

McDougall had no time to move before a shrill voice cried out, "Father, they lie to you!" It was Little Necklace, and there was fire in her eyes and her whole body was heaving with suppressed anger. McDougall touched her bare arm, but the little flat-head jerked away. She was not a wife now; she was a daughter, the princess of her people. And what was more, she was angry that she and her husband had had their blankets and cooking pots thrown out of McDougall's quarters for the convenience of Jane Barnes.

Little Necklace whirled upon us. "You let my father make a fool of himself before his slaves. You have let him drink rum until he is like a child. You do these things to cheat him for furs. And now you try to make him afraid—Comcomly who has never known of fear!" She looked up at baffled old Comcomly. "The King George woman is not dead. She fell down in sickness of breath and she will waken again. Father, you must believe me. King George man not good for you and our people."

McDougall could only stare unbelievingly. I doubt if he had ever dreamed that his little flat-head harbored such doubts. And as far as Comcomly was concerned, she needed to say no more. A semblance of understanding oozed into the old chief's good eye. He opened his mouth and let out a blast of sound that seemed to come clear from the depths of his three paunches. You would not have believed a shout like that could emanate from such a wrinkled bag of dark red flesh and bones.

Almost instantly, there came from the hills behind the fort an answering sound. It was the blood-chilling sound of hundreds of Chinooks and it galvanized McDougall and his men into actions they must have long practised in their minds. As for Captain Black, a look of positive joy came into his florid countenance as he ordered his marines to take positions in the bastions and repel boarders.

Not being a military man, or even a woodsman, I was merely standing there—not kneeling, as has been related by liars—not knowing what to make of things. Suddenly someone thrust a musket into my hands and told me to keep Comcomly at the end of it, and march him and his two slaves to the voyageurs' hall where I was to guard them as hostages.

I am frank to state I was glad enough for an invitation which would allow me to get out of the open yard. Arrows and spears were landing heavily in the enclosure. A huge rock narrowly missed my head, and the din of firing and shouting was enough to set a man insane. A few of the savages had got into the enclosure before the gates could be jammed, and for several minutes it was tomahawk and spear against cutlass and gun. The few trade muskets that the Chinooks owned were almost harmless. But the spears and arrows were knocking *Racoon* marines off their perches with alarming regularity. One poor fellow turned his head for an instant to reload, and I saw an arrow shuck out his teeth like corn from a cob. McDougall's men were more astute and did not expose themselves so freely—but not all of them, wise as they were to Chinook guile, managed to stay upright at their gun-slits and bastion posts.

It was a thing to be well out of, and when I got Comcomly and the two slaves inside, I sat them down on a bench well away from the doorway.

Keeping my weapon snugly in the crook of my arm, I took a long drink from the bottle which McTavish, Black and McDougall and I had left there not half an hour before. Then, as befits a royal hostage, Comcomly was allowed to have a pull or two at it himself. He seemed as cool as the nose of a fiddler's bitch and perfectly sure of the outcome of the attack. But I had an idea, and I am a stubborn man.

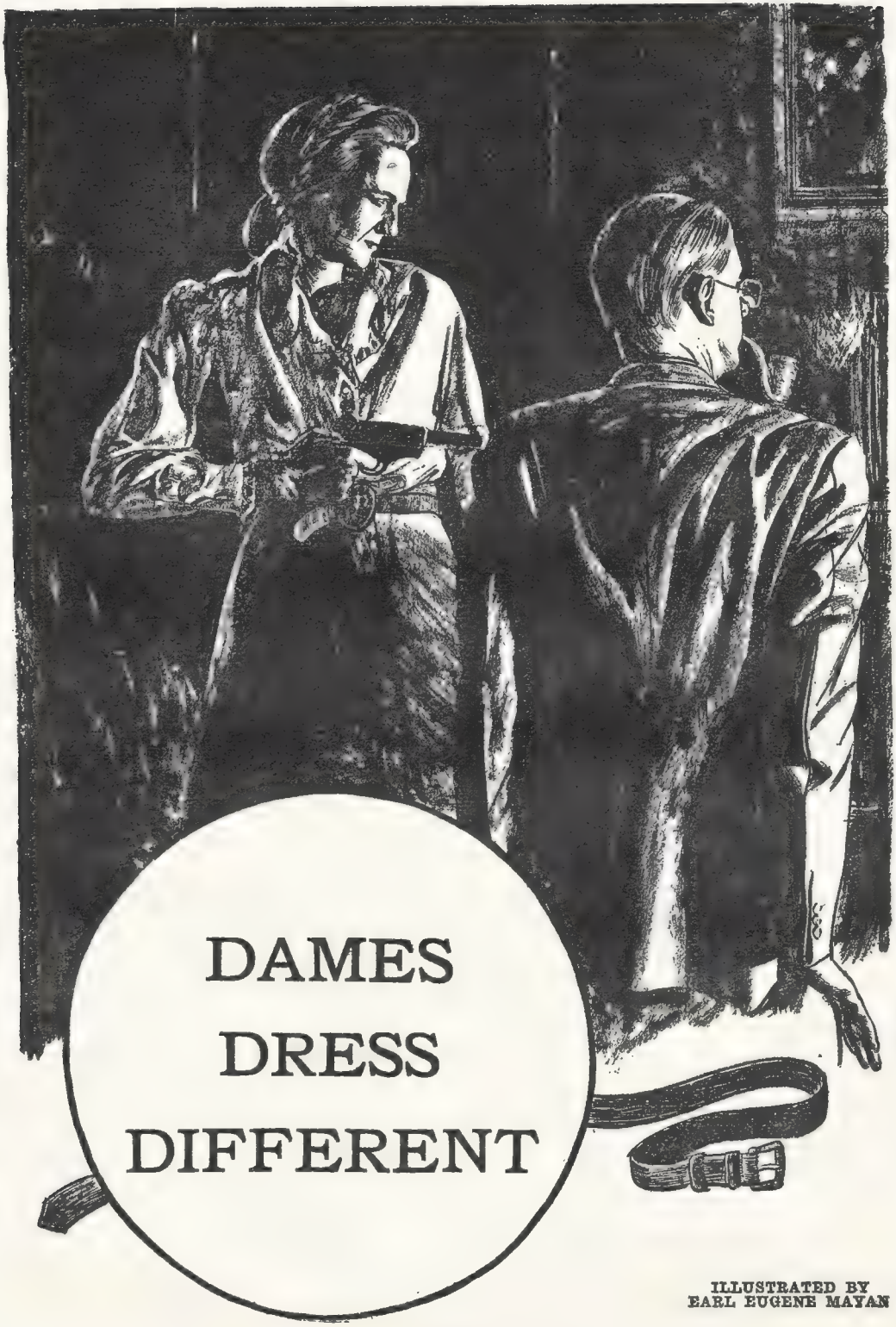
"Comcomly," I said, "everything that your daughter said may be true. But this war is a foolish thing." The one eye regarded me skeptically, but not without interest. "Not only are McDougall's men well-armed, but there are also King George men from Captain Black's fire canoe. They are warriors who have learned nothing else but to make war. Your people cannot hold out against them. Many Chinooks will be killed. And those that are left, the ones who will mourn the dead—what will they say about you, Comcomly?"

The one eye blinked—twice. I went on, "They will say, 'Why has Comcomly done this thing?' They will say that you caused a needless killing, and that there are many widows because of your vanity. They will say that you had been a kind chieftain, but that when you could not marry the King George woman you lost your wise head. Comcomly, let me tell you what you should do."

Comcomly reached for the bottle and tipped it. "Speak on," he said.

"You should go to the bastions and order your warriors back to their lodges in peace. You should tell them there has been a mistake, and that you looked upon the King George woman and decided she was unworthy to be their queen and your wife. And there I speak the real truth, Comcomly. She is a bad woman. She has brought evil to this fort. She is bringing death to your people and mine now.

(Continued on page 146)



DAMES DRESS DIFFERENT

ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN

She wagged the Luger and said, "Joseph told you to sit down, soldier."

By DOUGLAS H. FOX

I NEEDED a shave. I needed a haircut. I needed a uniform-press. My combat boots looked as though I'd been swinging a pick in a muddy ditch. I fingered the M.P. brassard on my left arm and felt a little sick at the sight of the three stripes it almost hid on the sleeve of my Eisenhower jacket.

I stared at the lettering on the frosted glass panel of the door six inches from my nose. It read: *Military Police Headquarters.* Near the bottom of the glass were three names. I was concerned only with the first—Major H. H. Bekin, Security, USFA.

I needed God. I was six days AWOL on a three-day pass to a town called Paris. I was neck-deep in trouble. Only a miracle would see me come out of the major's office with my three stripes and the M.P. brassard still intact.

I tucked my helmet liner under one arm, knocked at the door, heard a sharp, "Come in," and entered, feeling as empty as the Nuremberg stadium on V-E Day.

A red-headed corporal looked up from behind a German-made portable typewriter. I handed him the buck-slip which had come down to the Orderly Room twenty minutes before. The corporal made a sad face.

He said, "Oh, brother!" and pointed over his shoulder.

I went past him to the huge brown door at the end of the room. I took a deep breath, bounced my knuckles on the door and stepped into the major's sanctum.

Major Bekin was a small-boned man somewhere in his early fifties. He was well-tanned from the Austrian summer sun and his face held a steady, ruddy glow of health. His quiet brown eyes focused on me. I snapped to attention, saluted, said, "Sergeant Garris reporting, sir."

"At ease, Sergeant. Take a chair."

His voice was too quiet, too comforting. I pulled up a chair, sat down. The palms of my hands were sweaty. I was nervous, jerky.

Major Bekin leaned back from his desk, a sharp frown darkened his brow. He looked straight at me and said, "Before this Paris trip of yours, Garris, you were next in line for a staff-rating. You also have a substantial stack of points. And, on top of all this, you have an A-1 military record. Right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You worked on the Lunkeckt case at Hallein and you were highly instrumental in smashing that Metz gang." He leaned over his desk, small hands clasped across his stomach. "You were probably pretty sharp as a private detective in civilian life. Somehow, you don't look like a man who'd make a sap of himself, loose in Paris. But I notice you've fouled up pretty bad."

I nodded. I wondered how long this was going to go on. I would have given anything to have been out of there, away from those quiet, searching eyes.

He went on, "You deserve a stiff court-martial, Garris." His voice dropped a full register. "You don't deserve to go home, points or no points!"

"No, sir," I said. I was squirming.

He made a noise of disgust in his throat, pulled out a desk drawer. He tossed a pair of naturalization-size photos into my lap. "Look at those carefully," he said.

I did. One was a woman, the face heavy-featured, thick, mannish-looking. The eyes were bold, frog-like. When the picture was taken she had been wearing a German army woman's blouse. Her name was Vedda Komar.

The second photo showed me a tough-looking bozo with high cheekbones, and a deep cleft in his wedge-shaped chin. I noted the Kraut haircut and the way the ears stuck out from the bullet-shaped head. The name was Franz Hofer.

I studied the pictures a full two minutes, placed them back on the major's desk.

"Know them?" Major Bekin asked.

"No, sir, I don't."

"That's too bad. It would have made your job a lot simpler, Sergeant." He rose from his desk, walked leisurely to one of the immense windows of the office. He gazed out at the Hendel Platz. He didn't turn, as he said, "If you dig up those two for me, Garris, you can forget about this AWOL business. And I'll see to it that you get your staff-rating and shipping-home papers, too, if they happen across my desk."

Then suddenly he whirled round and came over to me. His lips were hard, set. Some of the tan seemed to drain from his features as he said, "Sergeant, we've *got* to lay our hands on those two! Dead or otherwise!"

"Yes, sir," I said.

Major Bekin swung back to his desk. He produced a thin dossier and flipped it over to me. "Some items in there might help you," he said. "It's all we've got on Vedda and Franz." For the first time since I'd come in, he smiled. It was a glowing, reassuring smile. "Tell me, Garris, are the women's hair-do's in Paris still that God-awful midnight blue color? Or are they wearing it red, this season?"

I stood up, managed a feeble grin. "It depends upon what section of Paris a guy patronizes, sir," I said.

Then I got out of there.

THERE are two Red Cross branches doing all right by the veterans in Salzburg, but I knew I'd find Mickey Ransom at the Doughnut Dugout. There's a WAC corporal there who's got honey in her voice and the bluest eyes of any dame on the other side of the Rhine. Mickey, who'd been a cop in Detroit and could talk three languages, would be at the Dugout looking and listening, I knew. He'd been there every night for the past month. We were beginning to call him Doughnuts Ransom.

The Dugout was jammed to the rafters, as usual. The WAC with the honey voice was giving out with *Lili Marlene*, accompanied by an Austrian eight-piece orchestra. I found Mickey at a table so close to the singer that you could see the zipper in the side of her skirt. I snared a doughnut, drank a cup of coffee, then broke in on Mickey's dreaming.

I said, "A man named Major Bekin has handed us a little job, pal." I pointed at the dossier. "Let's go and have a look."

Mickey spread big hands before me and with a childlike innocence in his yellowish eyes, said, "*Us.* Brother, you forget that I'm a member of the armed forces in good standing. What business do I have with an AWOL?"

"Chop it off," I said. "Come on. Let's get at it."

"I've got a date with this thrush, Garris. I—"

"You and a coupla hundred other guys," I said. It took me ten minutes, but I finally got him upstairs in the writing room. The place was practically deserted. I opened the dossier and we went over the stuff for about an hour.

At the end of it Mickey lounged back in his chair. He has a two-inch shrapnel scar along his right jaw. No whiskers grow there. He fusses at it with his fingers when he's mulling over something. He fussed with it now.

He said, "Bad actors, this Vedda and Franz. Wonder how many they've got working with them?"

"Hard to figure these Black Market deals," I said. I watched Mickey shove a stick of gum into his mouth. Then I added, "Well, we got a coupla leads from this dossier. Let's get going on it tomorrow."

Mickey hoisted his big frame out of the chair. His jaw moved methodically, worrying the gum. He said, "For a little guy, Garris, you can get into some of the damnedest messes. See you in the morning."

When we arrived at the Supply Building there was enough brass scattered around to cast a new door for a First National Bank.

A full colonel stopped us from going inside. He gave us the dagger-eye, looked me up and down, and said, "What do you want, Sergeant?"

"Clothes, sir," I said. I flashed the credentials Major Bekin had sent over to me. "Working on a case for Security, sir," I explained.

The colonel frowned. "I see," he said. "Major Bekin is here, anyway. Go right in."

Inside, the brass was even more in evidence. I wondered why a two-star general happened to be up so early. I knew a moment later.

Supply Sergeant Dave Sawyer lay face down on a small pile of duffel bags. His legs and arms were flung out awkwardly. I knew he was dead, even before the division surgeon turned him over.

I heard Mickey whisper, "Lordy!" then I slipped behind the supply counter. I grabbed two plain O.D. shirts, trousers and garrison caps. I tossed the stuff over to Mickey, came from behind the counter and took another look at Sawyer.

I was close enough to hear Major Bekin say, "Strangled to death. Queer, there're no bruises on his throat. Maybe they used a rope, or a rag."

I hung around for about ten minutes, watching staff photographers get the scene on film. A couple of captains from the OSS took prints all over the room.

It wasn't until the body was removed that I had a chance at Major Bekin. He told me that sometime during the night, Supply had been broken into. Five hundred O.D. blankets were missing, along with several cartons of O.D. uniforms, combat shoes and other military equipment.

"Sawyer must have surprised them," the major said. "They didn't dare use a gun, of course."

"Do you think Hofer and Komar had anything to do with this, sir?" I asked.

"No way of telling, Garris. There's more than one black market gang operating in Salzburg these days."

There was something bothering me about the way Sawyer looked, particularly the way he was dressed, when the division surgeon had turned him over on his back.

I took a chance and said, "Major Bekin, I'd like to make a suggestion, sir. Make sure you get all the fingerprints you can from Sergeant Sawyer's belt."

The eyebrows lifted over the quiet brown eyes. "Fingerprints? Belt?"

"Yes, sir. It's just a hunch of mine. I've got to get going now, sir. I'll tell you about it later."

OUTSIDE, getting into the requisitioned jeep, Mickey said, "What's this mystery stuff about Sawyer's belt?" He jammed the starter and the jeep jumped forward.

"No mystery about it, fella," I said. "I've known Sawyer for almost a year. He's one of the neatest dressers in our outfit. There was something wrong with the way he had his belt on, that's all."

"I didn't notice anything," Mickey said. Then, as he wormed the jeep carefully around a pushcart, "Lordy, some funny smells in these streets."

"Yeah. Like some parts of Los Angeles," I said.

We pulled up in front of the apartment house the M.P.'s were using for barracks, parked and went in. We changed clothes in a hurry—no helmet liners, no brassards, no rank chevrons—threw some K-rations in the back of the jeep and headed for the Riedenburg district.

There was a shoemaker there I wanted to talk to. According to the dossier on Komar and Hofer, he'd known both at one time. I thought it might lead to something.

Rudolph Sandwirt was cutting a piece of ersatz leather when we entered his small shop. He looked up as we barged in, and Mickey spouted something in German at him.

"I speag a leedle Engleesh," Rudolph said. His smile was snaggle-toothed. He looked about sixty. He was round-shouldered and his complexion almost duplicated the color of the leather he was cutting.

Fixing my eyes on his face, I said, "Do you know a Vedda Komar or a Franz Hofer?"

He looked down and placed his knife in a

small rack. He said, "*Ja.* Before the var, I know dem."

"Not since?"

"Nod since. Ve all played music in der town band, one uf dem, I mean."

This was getting nowhere. I made my voice stern. "If you have any idea at all where they are, Rudolph, you'd better tell us. Withholding information from the military brings trouble."

The old boy looked worried, at that. But he shook his head vigorously, saying, "*Nein, nein.* I do nod know."

I took a quick look around his shop, while Mickey talked German with Rudolph. Half-hidden under a cot in the back of the place I spotted a pair of GI combat boots. I looked them over carefully. They were practically new, no repairs had been done on them. There were regulation shoeshops for servicemen in the town, I knew, but this was not the time to raise a row with Rudolph.

Our next stop was at the Salzburg Committee of Musicians, where I wanted some information about a guy named Joseph Eiche. The committee was housed in a massive stone structure just off Lenzer Platz. The place was crowded with musicians and the air was foggy with cigarette smoke. The huge room smelled like burning oil rags.

"Some hiring hall," I said to Mickey. "Must be a thousand people here." I lit a cigarette. "This is where the orchestras come from for Army mess layouts, banquets for brass, variety shows and stuff. Uncle Sam keeps his fingers on 'em, like this."

We found the captain in charge, a nervous man with battle-aftermath gray hair, dull eyes. I showed him my credentials, asked about Joseph Eiche.

The captain dug out roster sheets, ran a finger up and down long columns of names.

"Here it is," he said, "Joseph Eiche—plays accordion at Transient Mess Number Six. Been there steady for two months. Seems law-abiding and reliable. Suffers occasional migraine headaches, has to lay off work. No demerits on his record, otherwise." He glanced up at me. "Anything else, Sergeant?"

"No, sir. Just give me his home address, is all."

JOSEPH EICHE was not at Transient Mess No. 6 when we got there. The orchestra leader told me he'd reported in that he didn't feel well.

"Should've gone to where he lived in the first place," Mickey grumbled, as we climbed back into the jeep.

"Maybe," I said. "I'll bet you a month's pay that those migraine headaches have been pretty convenient for little Joseph."

"When are you going to let me in on this case?" Mickey asked. "Hell, all I do is drive from place to place, and try to figure how you're figuring."

I grinned. "When we catch up with this accordion player I'll tell all," I promised.

Mickey wheeled the jeep across the narrow bridge spanning the Salzach river and headed for the Norr district. We wound and twisted through streets over cobblestone which had been laid in Caeser's prime. Finally, we drew up in front of a three-story stone building at the end of a narrow, smelly street.

As I got out of the jeep, Mickey said, "Better take your gun with you."

"Nix. I don't want to excite anybody. . . Hold tight, I won't be long."

I climbed three flights of stone stairs as noiselessly as I could, checking each landing for the musician's name-card. I found it on the third floor, front, neatly printed beneath an imitation brass lion-head knocker.

I flattened an ear against the door-jamb. I heard low voices, but could distinguish nothing definite. I straightened, banged my knuckles hard on the door. I heard a chair scrape, then a voice called out in German from the other side.

I said, "Speak English! And let me in, this is military authority!" I made it sound tough.

The door came open, quick.

I said, "Joseph Eiche?"

"Yes. Why?"—in excellent, almost Harvard English.

He had the build of a wasted-away lightweight. He wore Alpine leather shorts, the usual velvet-cuffed, velvet-collared jacket. He was bald-headed and bifocal glasses rode high on his thin sensitive nose.

"Routine check-up," I said. "You're not playing tonight?"

"A terrific headache," he said. "Won't you come in?"

I stepped inside, found myself in a large living room, lighted only by two candles. There was a table in the center, two straight-backed chairs. I barely made out a doorway to my right and another on my left. Most of the room was in shadows, though I could make out a square iron stove and a couple of chairs set against one wall.

Joseph Eiche moved away from me, turned a chair from the table and said, "Sit down, sir." His voice was politeness itself.

It was then that I noticed a movement in a far corner of the room. I leaned against the door I'd just entered and said, "Who's your friend?"

For a long moment I heard only the sputtering of the candles, then the figure rose from the corner. I looked swiftly at Eiche. He stood near the table, his hands still on the chair. There was a small, tight smile on his lips.

He said, "That, sir, is Fräulein Vedda Komar, a musician acquaintance of mine."

SHE came out of the shadows like an Amazon emerging from a cave-mouth. She towered six-feet-two if she stood an inch. Candlelight showed me a plain white blouse which covered door-wide shoulders. A narrow belt with a plate-sized buckle was around her middle. Beneath it a dark skirt bulged and flowed over tremendous hips. Her legs, like inverted bowling pins, were bare. She wore ski shoes. As she came into the light I saw the Luger in one of her huge paws.

She came within three paces of me, her face dead-pan. She wagged the Luger and said, "Joseph told you to sit down, soldier," and her voice came from the floor.

I tore my eyes away from the silver buckle, crossed to the chair. Eiche gave me a rough frisking before letting me sit in it. My pockets yielded twenty dollars in Allied Invasion dough, some Red Cross tickets and the credentials from Major Bekin.

Eiche's eyes lighted up at the money and the credentials.

To Vedda, he said, "How fortunate. The soldier and I are about the same size, *and* credentials."

Vedda nodded. She looked at me with frog-bulging eyes and said, "Come over to the window, here, and tell your comrade to come up and join you."

I said, "Nuts to you, sister. And put that gun—"

She took one step toward me. I never saw her free hand move, but I heard my neck crack as she caught me on the side of the head. I went hurtling out of the chair and banged up against a wall. For a full minute I saw stars, nothing else. When my head cleared, Vedda was standing over me.

She said, "Do as you are told, soldier."

I wobbled to my feet, to the window. I shouted down at Mickey, then regained my chair.

They let Mickey in when he knocked. The Luger relieved him of his Service .45 and Eiche emptied his pockets. It took them about thirty seconds.

Mickey sat in the chair next to me. Out of a corner of his mouth he said, "Garris, the Philo Vance of Salzburg." Then, "Geeze, what a babe!"

I said, "Yeah. Don't cross her, pal. She hits hard and like lightning."

Vedda stood in front of us, unsmiling, her eyes glued on us. Eiche was at the table checking over Mickey's personal effects.

He held up a white slip of paper, the jeep trip-ticket. He smiled at Vedda. "Unlimited use of a U. S. Army vehicle," he said.

"Good," said the woman-mountain. She turned to me. "Take all your clothes off." Her eyes suddenly frosted. "Make quick."

I didn't give her any argument this time. I undressed, save for my underwear.

Vedda waved the Luger. "*All* your clothes," she said.

I heard Mickey chuckle. Then I heard him hit the floor. He landed flat on his back, the chair on top of him. He sat up with the strangest look I ever saw on a man's face.

"Lightning," I said, sitting baby-naked in my chair.

She made Mickey undress, then, too. He was just finishing when there came a signal-knock at the door.

Eiche let in a guy who was about an inch shorter than Vedda, and about two pounds heavier. The high cheekbones, the way the ears stuck out from the bullet-shaped head, the cleft in his chin, told me it was Franz Hofer.

A nasty grin spread over his face as he took in the situation. "*Gut,*" he said, dry-washing his hands, "*Gut.*" He turned to Vedda, spoke in German.

Then he and Eiche left the room and returned a moment later with some clothesline rope. While Vedda covered us with the gun, her boy-friends went to work on Mickey and me. After we were trussed up, but good, they used our own handkerchiefs for gags. Hofer dragged us across the cement floor into another room, opened a closet door and threw us in. I heard the key turn in the lock.

Vedda's voice came to us, "You are fortunate, I do not kill you. I find it unnecessary, for we will never meet again." After that I heard the apartment door slam shut and, a short time later, the unmistakable noise of a jeep starting.

I don't have the faintest idea how long I lay on the icy floor of that closet, shivering. But I did plenty of thinking, despite the raw spots on my backside. All my thinking amounted to the same thing—I was sunk. When Major Bekin heard about how I'd messed up the Komar and Hofer case, he'd throw the book at me. On top of the AWOL, it'd be a couple of years before I could even start thinking about going Stateside again.

I started to writhe around. I bumped against Mickey, felt other objects in the closet, jerked this way and that, striving to loosen my cords. They only sank deeper into my tortured flesh. Suddenly I rammed up against something and there was a blatant outburst of discordant music. For a split-second I was scared silly, then it came to me. I'd whammed into Joseph Eiche's accordion!

There were other tenants in this apartment house. . . Maybe, just maybe. . .

Mickey and I took turns rolling and bumping into the instrument. Each time one of us crashed into it there was a cascading crescendo of jumbled notes. We made noise.

Soon my shoulders ached and my spine felt

as though all the hide had worn off. Just when I was beginning to think that all the occupants of the building must be deaf, the closet door suddenly flung open.

A fat, round-faced geezer, eyes popping, kept saying, *"Was ist dies? Was ist dies?"* as he removed our gags. When we were untied, Mickey spouted German. The round-faced one dug us up some old trousers, one coat and a sweater. Mickey said some more to him in German and then we took off.

We ran about two blocks before we came across a Pfc. driving a jeep.

THERE are two main roads stretching out of Salzburg to Vienna. One is used exclusively for military traffic, the other permits both civilian and military travel.

I figured Vedda and the boys would choose the autobahn which allowed both kinds of traffic.

"That way," I told Mickey, "they'll only be stopped twice by road-guards, for identification and trip-ticket. There're four stops on the military autobahn. I don't think they'll chance it."

"I've lost all confidence in what you think about anything, any more," Mickey growled.

In the dark, sitting beside him, I laughed. "O.K," I said, "O.K. Boy, wait'll HQ finds this jeep stolen. I—"

"I'd steal the commanding general's staff car," Mickey broke in, "if I had the least chance of seeing that Vedda fräulein again. There's a babe I want to get. And I don't mean wolf, either." He swung around a sharp curve of the back-country road. "You said that we lost a little over an hour from the time they bounced us into the closet. So, on this road I figure we've got a chance to stop 'em."

"Right," I said. "This road, according to my map, cuts off twenty-five miles to Vienna, where I'm sure they're headed. It's the only logical place to unload U. S. equipment and they've got plenty of it." I lighted a cigarette. "I also figure that they had to take their time in getting out of Salzburg. That, on top of the one twenty-minute stop at the first road-guard station all adds up in our favor. We just *might* see them again."

We'd stopped off at the M.P. barracks to pick up pistols and flashlights. And it had been Mickey's idea to don army overcoats over our civilian clothes.

Finally we came to the road junction. We parked the jeep in a clump of bushes, doused the lights.

"The first road-guard station is about a quarter-mile down this highway," I told Mickey. "We've got to stop every jeep. If we don't turn up anything in thirty minutes, it's our funeral." I turned up the collar of my coat against the cold wind. "We'll have to get word to Major Bekin then. He can throw out a net to pick up the gang before they reach Vienna."

Mickey said, "I'll pray, too."

We took up positions about fifteen yards apart along the highway. Twenty minutes passed and we stopped four jeeps. As the tail light of the last disappeared in the darkness, I felt certain we were finally and completely beaten and Vedda's words, "We will never meet again," burned in my brain.

I'd practically made up my mind to walk to the road-guard station and get in touch with M.P. Headquarters, when pinpoints of light flickered in the darkness far down the road.

As the lights drew nearer, I noticed there was another vehicle behind the first.

"You take number two," I yelled at Mickey, "I'll take the first one."

I thumbed my flashlight, swung the beam back and forth across the highway.

As the lead car slowed, I saw it to be a jeep. Directly in back of it towered a six-by-six. I took no chances, kept away from the glare of headlights. When the jeep halted, I centered my flashlight flush in the face of the driver.

The beam reflected from the bifocal glasses of Joseph Eiche! The hulk sitting behide him was Hofer and filling the back seat was Vedda. They were all in regulation khaki.

I said, "Get out of there, Eiche. And keep your hands up!" My pistol was in my other hand, then.

As Eiche climbed from under the wheel, Hofer started to scramble out the other side. The movement startled me and I swung the light toward him. Eiche used that split-second to knock the flash from my grasp.

The next thing I knew he had a vise-like grip on my gun hand and one arm clutched my middle. As he forced me backward and down, I shouted to Mickey. Simultaneously I squeezed the trigger of my gun. Blue-white flame stabbed harmlessly into the night sky. I crashed to the pavement with Eiche on top of me.

I twisted violently, felt my gun barrel jab into Eiche's guts. He jerked from me just as I again pulled the trigger. It missed. I felt a thumb gouge into one eye-socket, heard the musician's muttered, "Swine!" as I writhed in agony.

From somewhere out of the night came Mickey's roaring voice, "Look out, Garris!"

I turned my head, saw the six-by-six truck swing out from the jeep. Two bursts of orange-flame flashed, low over the pavement—Mickey's bullets trying to find tires.

Eiche wrenched away from me as headlights bore down on us. Out of the darkness I heard Vedda yell something in German. I spurted lead in the direction of her voice and saw Eiche scramble to his feet. For one brief moment he

stood erect, in the full glare of the headlights. I gave it to him between the shoulders. He screamed once, his arms flailed outward, then he hit the concrete.

I rolled. Truck wheels missed me by inches. Even as I went spinning into the ditch, gunfire blasted from the driver's cab as the truck roared past.

I felt searing pain above my right elbow. Then I started to sink into a bottomless pit of ink. Through semiconscious fog I heard more gunfire. The whole roadway seemed to be swarming with dark figures. Just before I passed out, I had the answer.

The road-guards had come down from their station to get the score.

MAJOR BEKIN said, "Mickey tells me you picked up Vedda's and Hofer's trail from the shoemaker, Rudolph Sandwirt, who was driving the six-by-six the night of the capture. As the truck was full of Army equipment, we've got the drop on them there. But," and his quiet eyes looked puzzled, "you've signed a murder charge against Vedda. You claim she killed Sergeant Sawyer. I don't say she didn't, Garris. But how the devil are we going to prove it?"

I shifted in my chair, eased my arm which was still in the cast.

I said, "Remember the suggestion I made about making sure of prints on Sawyer's belt?" The major nodded. I went on, "Sir, Sawyer was always a careful dresser. Always looked sharp. When I saw his corpse, the belt in his trousers was looped so that the tip pointed to the right hip." I shook my head. "Sir, no soldier I ever knew wore a belt that way. Even in civilian life a man's belt-tip points to his left hip. It came to me that only a woman would loop a belt that way. Most dames dress differently, when it comes to belts. I figure Vedda strangled Sawyer—God knows she's capable of it—with his own belt. Then, in replacing it, woman-like, she threaded it backwards." I got up to go. "As a matter of fact, sir, she had a belt on in just that fashion the first time I ever saw her."

Major Bekin looked up at me. He said, "You can pick up your staff-sergeant chevrons from the corporal in the front office, Garris." He gave me that slow smile. "You can forget about that AWOL business, too. And I might add that you've as good a chance as the next man for Stateside shipment. A little better, now, perhaps."

"Thank you, sir," I said.

The red-headed corporal was still behind the German-made portable. He handed me the chevrons and said, "You lucky stiff."

I let it go. What could a guy say to that?

ILLUSTRATED BY
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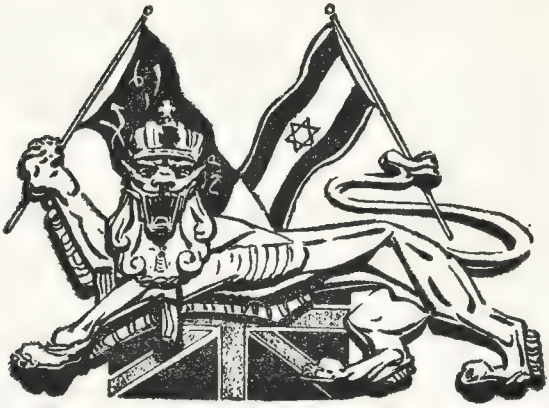


JOB ACROSS JORDAN

★

I HAD no business in Nazareth. Only that I'd been doing a snoop job on some sabotage on the oil pipe line that runs through from the big Mosul fields to Haifa on the Palestine coast and so has made the place important. Even so I didn't have any interest to stop there, but that this hard-looking Arab with a Citroen car that must have been made not long after Bible times had come to me on the Trans-Jordan side and offered to drive us to Haifa for as little as one pound British.

Cain, who's my whole intelligence staff, grinned at the man and said, "What, O Man of The Druz, will you rather pay us for the protection that our presence will add to one who

The Tommies at the barb wire barricades stopped us for our papers—but my passport as an Egyptian astrologer got us by.

dresses like a chief yet drives a car like this offal barge?"

So the Arab saw that he wasn't dealing with tourists and he said all right if I could wangle him some gasoline; and well, a pound is a pound, and there's a Mac to my name, and I could fix for a few gallons, and I wasn't asking his funny business if he wasn't asking mine. So off we rattled.

And the only reason we stopped at Nazareth was that night came down like a blanket and just at the tail end of the town where there's some truck gardens and melon patches, there came a rush of dark shapes over the *durrah* stalk fences and a half a dozen of 'em hacking at the Arab with knives and guns spitting out of the blackness like a movie of the old Chisholm Trail. All of 'em seemed to climb across my lap to get at him and they didn't care much whom they hit, and so, while I couldn't think it was any of my fight, I had to shoot it out.

And then, the next thing, there were figures running off in the dark and three still shadows in the road and the Arab gone too. Cain got out to look over the shadows. His voice came up: "None of this is the Arab. All are yours, Master, clean center of forehead." And right then a barrage of shots came from the garden fences. Cain made the car in one motion and he's a right bright lad. He said, "This place, Master, is the very doorway to hell. Let us speedily depart."

Which we pronto did. Modern Nazareth has changed quite a bit from the old days. A while later, as we racketed along, Cain had another shrewd idea. "Let us not go back to face questionings and vengeances." Which, too, we did not.

Come to Haifa, I reported the matter to the cops, and they were very calm over what was nothing new. "Arab-Jewish gang fight," they supposed. "Any idea who your man was?" I knew no more than that he was somebody who'd picked me up and he looked like something better than just a camel driver. "Some leader," they said, "and the opposition was jolly well laying for him."

Well, as I said, it was none of my business—not then. But that's the sort of thing that happens to a hard-working dick who's tired of getting shot at by all the thugs in the Middle East and is looking for nothing but peace and maybe settle down with a girl that's happened to him like a miracle, before she finds out what kind of a life he's got to lead.

I'M Mike MacIlvain, private dick, and I know my way around the slimier crookednesses of the Mid East quite a bit; so I'd just finished up this job for our Secretary of—Well, I'd better leave the names of the big shots out of the dirt. Anyway, it was for Washington and it seemed to have satisfied 'em; for just as I was hugging myself for having got clear with my hide still in pretty near one piece and figuring to bring this girl home, the Sec'y cabled me to hurry up and stay right where I was.

In about five hundred dollars' worth of code he cabled, that took me damn near a week to untangle it, and I was plumb sick. I cabled back; no code, plain solid American.

"Nothing doing. I'm no hero to get shot up for glory."

And he fired back at me, code again, and I could fair see the sly grin on his face, "You'll get shot up for Uncle Sam's great benefit; and if you don't I'll rescind all your passports."

So well, the man sort of had me high up a tree. I don't have to be telling you that Uncle is tight-roping along some pretty intricate foreign policies these days and he needs the straight low-down on some pretty crooked diplomatic deals. The passport stuff was just the Sec'y's gag. I had four of 'em—with his help of course; so I could take my choice of just who I'd be in this rats' nest.

What he coded me, to cut his half grand's worth short, was that Uncle was sending a committee to join up with a British crowd to investigate this Palestine *vs.* Arab trouble that was boiling all over the border and they just had to know exactly who were the bad boys in the picture, because half the nations of Europe were playing sides for their one devious reason or another.

It never seemed to strike this Sec'y that maybe I thought my own life was worth a dime or two. That's one of those little things that the guy who hires you always thinks is an expendable item in a dick's chore. You know, of course, what's been going on along the banks of Old Jordan. A bunch of Arabs up and kill a coupla Jews; and then presently a bunch of Jews up and collect a coupla Arabs. Plain gang warfare, that's what; and the British Mandate police every now and then catch some of the trigger men and solemnly try 'em and duly hang 'em. But what our committee had to know was exactly who was who amongst the big shots in the gangster elements on both sides—lawless factions who, in the guise of "patriots" were using the Palestine problem as a cover for their terrorist activities. They were giving both sides a bad name, and piling fuel on an already intricate and highly inflammable international problem. So what I was supposed to do was play the middle against both ends to put the finger on these gangsters. And that would set me nicely in the center of all the shooting.

I cabled the Sec'y, "This is a job for your overpaid local career diplomats." And I went to tell this girl Sadie about it.

And I wound up the sordid story with, "So, *Sherifa Bint,* I'm washing my hands clear of the dirt and we'll go on home and find us that rose arbor cottage and live happily ever after in this Peace that they tell us we've just won."

Sherifa Bint means Honey Girl and it's the name that this rogue Cain gave her because her hair is the exact color of their pale orange blossom honey, and what d'you think she said?

She said, "Mike MacIlvain, if you turn down this job that Uncle Sam needs there won't be any rosy cottage, not with me in it."

And that, if you ask me, was a helluva way for a missionary's daughter to talk. Her Pa and Ma Catelle were straight-and-narrow Baptists, but swell folks at that, and they ran a mission up at Baalbek all amongst the dead temples of Bacchus and Venus that the Romans left for tourists to come and gawp at; and just like those old timers used to leave extravagant offerings at the temples for their heathen gods, so do the Christian tourists for their heathen guides who are the sole industry of the dump; and whether the missionaries have ever converted any of those bandits to honesty is more than I ever found out.

I said to this Sadie, "But, *Tiffah* mine,"—that means Peach Blush, account of her complexion —"ye gods, it would mean working under cover so anything I might have to do when the shooting gets tough won't embarrass our jittery diplomats, and if the cops catch me they'll line me up like any other thug they haul in, and then who'd I appeal to for help? Conditions of this chore are that I'll have to be strictly on my own, unofficial, so there won't be any 'international episodes.' "

She said, "It is just that contingency that enables you to demand the exorbitant remuneration that you get."

She's erudite as all get out, is Sadie, and she peels off highbrow words without thinking. Her folks have been educating her at our American University at Beirut that's famous because St. George killed his dragon there; though if you ask me I think it ought to be a heap more famous for a real job that it's doing, teaching the American way of life to a lot of foreign boys and girls who'll grow up to be leaders amongst their people. And then every now and then Sadie remembers herself and comes down to earth to talk like normal folks. She said, "And what's more, if you don't tackle it Cain will squeal to everybody in all the bazaars that you were scared."

THIS Cain—Quain, is the way they spell it—is a lad I picked up to ferret out some of the bazaar undercurrents of crookedness that white men never get to hear about and he's as clever as sin; in fact, he's invented some of the more up-to-date sin in the bazaars and my guess is he's a direct descendant of the original; though he admits shamelessly, "I am the bastard of one Bin-Ullah, whom the police certify to be the craftiest bastard in the Mid East."

Sadie egged me on with encouragement. "Why not ask Cain? He'll probably know the whole story already, and if he doesn't, he'll know some way for you to find out."

So we called Cain in and he had a bright idea at once. He said, "Master can no longer pose as Manook Miljian the date dealer, for even the police know of at least half of the deaths that grew out of that affair. But the finding out of this matter will be very easy. Let Master let it be quietly known that he is, in truth, an *Amricani* gunman to be hired by either party that will pay the best price."

I looked at Sadie and just my face said, "So you see?"

She looked back at me with those big blue trusting eyes and she said, "It sure is dynamite, Mike. But those poor lost lambs of our old Uncle's investigating committee have *got* to know the dirt, and who else is there but you to find out for them?"

I said, "Intelligence," and she just wrinkled her nose like a kitten that's just dipped in sour milk.

That's the kind of talk that has shoved more than one sap into a mess. And then Sadie brightened up and she said, "And, Mike, I'll help you."

Migod! I took and I shook her. "You damn well will not," I told her. "I mean," I said, "you sure won't. You'll go back to college and learn sense. Or if they won't have you since you were kidnaped and stuck into a harem, you'll get back to your folks and help 'em convert the heathen. This chore isn't going to be any hymn-leading job for any mission girl."

"Well anyhow," she said, "I'll cheer your play from the side lines. Or I could be your mascot."

So well then, with a mascot like that, even if she just stayed home and prayed for you, what could a sap do? I told her, "All right then, on your head be it."

And she came back right out of the Book that her folks had made her learn backwards, "But not on the heads of my children forever. Because, Mike, if anything happens to you, there'll never be any." And she suddenly clung close, and I was sunk.

I talked it over with Cain, and every angle of it that we considered, all pointed back to his mad idea as the only way to get into the middle of happenings fast before our diplomatic boys might get themselves hornswoggled into some wrong partnership. As a gun on hire I'd be getting overtures from some of the big shots who are always so careful to keep out of the shooting; and I'll have to say here that, the way the

Cain started a whisper campaign in the bazaar, that the* Amricani *gunman was open for contracts.

bad cards had turned on that last deal, an impression had gotten around that I was a gun worth hiring. Not rightly earned, I'm free to tell you; but I let it ride. A tough reputation is often a pretty good ace to have in the hole.

I coded the Sec'y, "It's a deal—and bribe money and ex'es, when I put in my swindle sheet, will stagger the taxpayers."

He coded back, "If you live to put in a swindle sheet it'll be worth it." Nice sense of humor that guy has. And he added, "Crediting you ten thousand, Bank of Lebanon." And when a government official does that you know he thinks it's important.

I got my overtures all right and I got out of 'em, as the Arabic saying is, *talat bi gildi*, by the skin of my neck, and the cops looking at me suspicious, wondering who killed whom.

I chose my passport that said I was Marshall Mahan. Using the same initials is always handy to check with laundry marks and such and it saves mistakes when you sign things. I asked Cain where he thought would be a good place to hang out my shingle as a trigger man temporarily disengaged; and he said at once, Philadelphia.

Maybe you think that's a nice new American name for the City of Brotherly Love; but a gang of marauding Greeks thought of it quite a while before old Will Penn, and it was the site of some more of the ruins that all this country is paved solid with. This one has a blood-thirsty temple of Amman, and there's so little brotherly love there that when they made it the capital of Trans-Jordan they even switched the name to Amman.

It would be *the* one and only spot, Cain said, because it was nicely betwixt and between; right on the road between Palestine and the Arab kingdoms. So we jumped the air-conditioned bus that takes you along at a comfortable seventy degrees and dumps you out into the parched hell of a hundred-twenty. I couldn't afford to have anybody think I was just some cheap gun punk; so I invested some of the Sec'y's money in the best room in the Airlines Hotel that reminds you how new and up-to-the-minute it is, in the middle of all that antiquity, by having a pair of priceless alabaster winged bulls at its entrance—and I know where they stole them too. Cain slipped around the bazaar and started the whisper campaign that the gangster "Masslamahn," as he pronounced my new name, the *Amricani* gunman, was open for contracts. He made me sound like a bad character out of the Arabian Nights and the damned results might have been out of 'em too.

I MADE contact before the day was up. A *khaddam*—that's a bell-boy dressed like a general—came up and said a man wanted to talk with me. "Bring him right up," I said. But the bell-hop salaamed like I was a general and said the man's business was very secret and he would rather meet me a ways out on the Damascus road north of the town, and he was waiting for me right now.

"Oho!" I said to myself. "They're in a hurry to get recruits." For which I judged that some big killing was in the making. So I stowed my various armament about my person—what I mean, I never like to rely on just one gun; get frisked of it and you're naked. I use a shoulder holster, of course, and I like a lighter gun in a garter clip up my pants leg; and then I usually stick a big old .45 blunderbuss in my pocket as a come-on camouflage for the occasional dummox who doesn't know so much about the art of concealed weapons; and I've known times when a get-at-able knife can be sweetly effective too. If I've got to get into trouble I believe in taking precautions.

Of course I wasn't expecting any gun work on this little business call; but all that the Damascus road has changed in the last two thousand years is to an asphalt surface; there's as many thieves and flit-by-nights as ever in the days when St. Paul complained about them.

I walked out on the road, coming dusk, and there were a couple of late cars and the usual camel trains that sprawled all over the road and cursed the cars and their dust. I wondered what kind of a bullet-proof limousine my big shot would come along in; but instead of that

much respect for my bad reputation, all I got was a whistle from out across the scrub lots.

I left the road and scrambled along over chunks of old tumbled buildings and I damned the devious ways that an Oriental can think and sweated me a hot bath. Out a ways were the ruins of some more temples or whatever. Those old-timers must have been as religious as hell and they sure worked at it; here were slabs as big as freight cars that have the scientific sharps still wondering how their engineers ever got 'em there. I hollered, *"Hai! Ta'ala hena!* Come on out, whoever you are! What kind of a game is this?"

And in about two more cusses and a holler I found out it wasn't a game. A man who could have got a job in a sideshow as a hyena edged from behind a broken wall. I heard a couple of other soft shufflings from other holes and I knew there were more than the one. My back hair tingled. This was no way to come hiring a high spot trigger man. Nor was my hyena the sort of guy who looked like talking big business. All the clothes he had was a tatter around his middle that wedged upwards to heavy hunch-shoulders with a head slung low between them and his eyes were solid bloodshot red. I could see in a minute that he was all hopped up with *churrus*—that's a cheap hashish—and he talked it too, in that high-pitched jerky tone.

It wasn't business he talked. He said, "So you think you are a gunman?" and his head swayed like he was looking for an opening to rush in and bite.

Goddlemighty! And me come there all innocent, thinking to fool a gang of Orientals! Thinking that I was the smart and devious one! My back hair tingled and my spine crawled all the way down. I stood away from the brute and I had a feeble thought of warning him off, saying, "I have at least seen a gun before now."

He opened a mouthful of teeth at me and giggled in his high pitch. Damned if it wasn't exactly like a hyena; and I could swear I heard others whimpering back from around the rocks. Dusk is just the time that they all come out of their holes to hunt around for whatever has died during the day, and there was just enough dim daylight left for me to fit into their time limit. My beast whined at me like it was a big joke that I should think he was naked and weaponless, and right there a shadow of a hand came out from behind the wall and handed him a gun.

My quick guess was that he'd come out naked first just to size up whether I came all heeled and drawn, and seeing me with empty hands he signaled for his cannon and got the drop on me. I'll swear, too, that the brute fair clashed his teeth together and he sidled closer and chittered, "So you come from *Amrica* to show us Easterners our business? Hee-hee-he-e-e-ee!" He trailed off in high falsetto and he edged closer again.

Well, I'd seen enough of hop-heads in my business to know that this one wasn't fooling about anything and he was drunker with hate than ever with hashish. I suppose some white man must have booted him in the pants some time or other during the military occupation and here's where he was getting his own back.

He hoisted his gun—a big old British Webley, it was—and a yard from my face the hole in it looked the size of a half dollar. He whinnied once more to give himself the full benefit of his come-back; and that was all the chance I could afford with a madman like that. I drew fast and fired from the shoulder. Even in the near dark I could see the gleam of teeth fly. And then I jumped for the wall from where the other fellow had handed the gun. But that one had gone. I rasped some hide off myself squeezing in between building blocks flatter'n a scorpion and waited for the rest of the animals to start their barrage. This looked like the place where I'd played a dumb hand just once too often. But not a thing happened.

Well, they weren't fooling me. I knew that an Oriental could outwait a white man; but here was where I'd show 'em that I was the one scared *roumi* who'd damn well outwait them and let the first rash one show his head against the sky line.

But they did fool me. Nothing kept on happening. Not a scuffle amongst the rocks, not a whisper. I stuck it out for a couple hours, and then a jackal materialized out of the night and came sniffing at the lumped shadow of this other animal I'd killed.

So then I knew no other humans were around and I scrambled from my hidie hole; and the way that jackal somersaulted and ki-yied as he ran, you'd think he had a hemorrhage. And then at last I could let go a breath and laugh. Sort of nervous and maybe as high-pitched as my hyena, but one good lungful of a grateful cackle.

CHAPTER II

SNAKE IN SHEIK'S CLOTHING

BY THE time I got back to my fancy hotel I wasn't laughing any more. I was sweating mad, and for more than prickly heat; I'd been really fond of that gun, sweetly balanced and snug to the hand, and now I'd have to ditch it. Those Trans-Jordan cops, trained under British mandate, were nobody's fools; they knew all about prints and ballistic patterns. So I kicked a hole in the sand and wiped the little friend clear of evidence and I buried it with a silent prayer and thanks, old pal.

That was a luxury mattress in that hotel—these Mid East countries are some that have profited by the war. The war has needed their oil and their deserts for halfway airline stops to Further East. That's why the world is playing knockdown and drag-out politics there. So you'll find some of these up-to-the-latest-minute *serais* blooming like sudden Aladdin palaces right on the foundations of antique rubble. But don't let anybody think they've changed the way of the East.

A shadow of a hand came out from behind the wall and handed him a gun.

I had an airspring, super-ventilated mattress all right, but I couldn't catch any beauty sleep. I was bothered about that hyena man. There was something wrong in that picture. Admitted that no white man can figure the way the Orient thinks, I couldn't see this hop-head going to that elaborate a plan to lure me out to the ancient dumps to take a shot at me. If he just had to wipe off a hate on white men he could have done that anywhere and long ago; and why especially pick me for the goat? Just because he thought I was a rival in the profession? It didn't make sense from any angle. Why all the Halloween boogyboo setting?

It's easy to say, sleep on a problem; but this one was too twisted for me to unravel and in my kind of a job you can't afford to doze and hope for the best—you've damn well got to see to it that you get the best break. I'd already made one boob play, going out all innocent into that trap; just a couple more in this game and I'd be one-two-three, OUT.

Even if I could have dropped off in the sweaty early hours when sheer exhaustion breaks a man down, Cain didn't let me. He oozed in at my locked door like a hunted snake and he said, "From an unprincipled thief of an office attendant I have an extra key; and it is not known to me what Master may have done, yet from a dog's father of a bribe-taking policeman it is known that the police are coming to investigate you as soon as their office opens. Let therefore all evidence of whatever it was be hidden."

Cops! And me as unprotected as any other thug! I had to be grateful to the rogue. I told him, "I'm as innocent as a politician; but to encourage your thoughtfulness in keeping your ears open I'll double your outlay in buying information; and there's a *khaddam* of this hotel who brought me a message last night. Find him and give him money to go away to visit his farthest relative and see that he goes *now;* and then find at least two people who will swear that I was with them last night."

And then I had to sit back and afford myself a chuckle. That was the leisurely British of it in the East—breakfast with kippers and marmalade and then out to make their pinch.

And just about as I'd finished my own up in my room—the standard fish and jam too, 'cause the American cereal influence hasn't reached there yet—along came a nice-looking boy with a couple of *bolis ragili.* He left the native cops outside the door and he was nice and polite—that's the British of it too. He said, "I'm Inspector Wayland, sir. I'm sorry to have to ask you to give an account of your doings last evening."

I pulled their own haughty dignity on him, I said, "Oh yeah? And where the hell do you get off, asking gentlemen to explain their evenings?"

Maybe I didn't do it right; maybe that wasn't the British way of expressing injured dignity; or perhaps my accent was wrong. Or something. For then he got tough. He said, "All right, chum, if that's your angle; I'm bloody well askin' because a man was picked up with his teeth shot out and we have a report from Irak that a bloke who looks like you does some fancy shooting."

Well, it was true of course that I'd been compelled to cut down on a couple of punks who thought that just holding a gun pointed at a man gave 'em the drop on him, and my shooting isn't altogether amateur. But just straight shooting is no evidence against a man.

The inspector boy knew his routine. He said, "If you have a pistol I want to see it," and he grinned with meaning. "We have the bullet." He looked around the room, and there over the head of my bed was my shoulder holster!

He took just three long strides to it. "Aha! Empty! Where's the gun? Come on now, we're not so bloomin' stupid here; we'll search and find it."

Well now, just dumping a gun and leaving an empty holster as evidence that you had something incriminating is one of the amateur mistakes I don't make. I told him, "Since you're so damn determined about it, it's in my suitcase, like a peaceful citizen would have it." And of course it was—an extra gun that fitted that holster.

The boy rummaged it out and went through the motions; broke it, sniffed at it, found it empty and clean. He looked at me, not so sure now, and he said, half apologetic, "Well, we'll have to test this. But I must still ask you to explain your evening— Never mind, you could invent a good story. We've picked up your servant and they're bringing him now." He called to his cops, "Don't bring him in, I'll question him in the passage."

Quite smart this boy was and alert against any signals I might pass. I could hear him outside asking Cain where I'd been, and I nearly fell out of my chair. I could hear Cain's voice dumb and shameless: "To the police, *Effendi,* I must tell the truth, though even my Master may beat me for it. He was at the brothel of Yasmin Bibi in the Ismailia Souk, to which the house mistress and one of the henna-hand women will separately bear witness."

THE native cops guffawed. The inspector boy spent a good silent minute swallowing down his cocksure case and then he came back in and admitted the other half of his reluctant apology.

"Sorry, sir. Routine check-up and that sort of thing, you know. Troubled times and all that."

Polite, but I could see he didn't mean a word

of it. He looked at me like a gimlet and I knew he was just wondering what he had missed.

I told him, "O.K., buddy," and I remembered a bit out of Gilbert and Sullivan. I was happy enough even to sing it at him: "A policeman's life is no-o-ot a ha-a-a-appy one."

And I tried to fish out a little something for myself. "By the way, this fellow you say you picked up without any teeth—who was he?"

But he knew not a thing about that weird madman. He collected up his men and went. But, like I said, *talat bi gildi,* by the skin of my neck, I'd gotten out of that one and my back hairs still crawled with a cold feeling that this cop hadn't by any means written me off his list.

Cain sidled in, his grin like all the seven imps of the Prophet's dream, and he forestalled my complaint.

"Indeed, Master, what other place could one find in so instant a hurry, and what reputation has a gunman that may yet be spoiled?" But his grin was wiped off by seriousness. "Yet, Master, that inspector is a danger. His men caught even me; and when he learns the bazaar gossip about who you are he will polish up the gallows." And like an ape he switched to the next thought. "The cost, Master, was ten pounds British to each of the women."

"And," I could guess, "favors for you to come." I jotted it down on the taxpayers' expense account.

I found out about my hyena man all right, and before noon tiffin too. I got my cold lesson in devious Oriental thinking. I had more visitors. One dressed in the burnous and gold head ropes of a sheik, and damned if the other one wasn't our friend of the Citroen car whom the Nazareth Jews didn't like. He only grinned at me; but the sheik said very formally, *"Es sallam aleikoum,"* and I knew at once they were up to some devious deal.

Because, yes, I know that's the standard greeting for moving picture sheiks; but in Moslem countries it may be used only between true believers of the Prophet. I didn't give him back the reverse, *Wa aleikum es sallam.* I said, *"Ahlan bik."*

He smiled like he was genuinely pleased and he said, "It was told to me that *Effendi* is one who knows this land." Then he went and looked out of the windows and took a peek into the bathroom and closed the outer door and his pal went and stood before it.

I scratched the back of my head where I could make a quick reach for a throw knife that snuggled between my shoulder blades—just in case this might be another madman who didn't like interlopers. I invited him to sit on the divan and I held my nine feet of throwing distance, which is something else they don't know about in the movies.

The man kicked his shoes off and crossed his feet up under him; he was aiming to stay a while. He said, "The greeting was but a trial," completed a cool sizing up of me and then added, "—as was the *hashishin* amongst the ruins last night."

My back hair crawled again, just remembering it. I wondered what kind of a funny hookup this suave guy had with that maniac. He elucidated smilingly. "It was necessary to know whether *Effendi* was indeed a gunman, fearless as well as fast."

I gawped at him. He smiled some more like he was glad to be able to approve an applicant's qualifications. "It was but another trial."

My skin prickled cold at the coolness of him. I said, "You mean you sent that poor fool out just to find out if I was quick on the draw?"

As cold as a snake he was. He washed his hands together like a pair of them. "A fool indeed and consumed with hate beyond judgment; therefore worthless to us."

Well, I'd be damned! Here was devious Oriental thinking all right. I guess my eyes must have been popping. What bothered me was, "But suppose I'd been slow too and he'd killed me? He was within a split second of it."

The man squatted there like an Arabian Nights djinn and shrugged. I judged, if I wasn't fast I'd be worthless to them too. He confirmed it with his next mouthful: "When principles and national liberties are involved, what are lives?"

Damned if he didn't mouth it off like a wartime pep politician! It made him sound human and I was getting out of my surprise. I was able to ask, "O.K. then, who is 'We,' and what all are these so noble principles that don't count lives?"

HE STAGGERED me again by busting into English. "We," he said, "are Pan-Islam." The way he intoned it he even made it sound holy, like he might be saying, "We are Democracy!" or something. His accent was good Oxford and I knew then that his arguments would be logically flawless. He went into his prepared lecture and what he had, in effect, was that the Mid East had been Islamic country ever since Saladin threw out the last of the Crusaders; that in these days when the world—and especially America—talked so loud about self-determination, it was their sacred right to defend every member of their group against partition; that they, therefore, objected to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine; and that any such partition would be a confiscation as unjust as giving back Armenia to the Armenians or Texas to Mexico.

Well, of course, I'd heard all that line before from various Arabs all hot under their collars. It was what King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia and Amin Al Husseini, the Moslem

Grand Mufti of Jerusalem have been arguing for the last five years and every Mid East country across the map from Turkey to Egypt and from Syria to Hadramaut have been loudly copying.

I remembered that Ibn Saud had some forty sons, some of whom have been educated in England; though this guy didn't look like he was one of the family. But that shrewd lad Cain had been right. Here was my quick contact with at least one side of the story that was playing it strong-arm.

I said, "I'm not here to argue sides; I'm just a gun on hire. Take me to your boss and I'll listen to his proposition."

But the man was smart; he smiled like an old friend. "Don't be naive. I am one of a group of patriots who feel that we must battle for our country; a humble one, but I am authorized to tell you what we need."

Patriots! I said, "Yeah, everybody during this last war was patriots and they were heroes or dogs, depending on what language you read the reports in. So what dirt d'you want done?" And I made it professional: "What d'you pay?" Once I'd get my in with this gang, I'd find my way to the big shots.

He said, "The first commission is an easy one. We ourselves abhor bloodshed"—his smile was like a brass Sphinx—"but the leader of our enemies in Palestine is one Semmeh'l Quintara, who constantly organizes armed attacks upon us. If he should be, er—persuaded, to come to a conference with us, many lives might be saved."

Camel milk curd wouldn't have melted in his mouth. Persuaded, he said. I could guess that Cain had really done a job on my bazaar reputation. So all this crowd wanted was for the head gun of the rival gang to be kidnaped and delivered. Just as easy as that.

But that name didn't sound like any Jewish opposition. Al Quintara, as a matter of fact, is the ancient place where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. And it's true; it could happen. Get the right wind and neap tides and it's waist deep; and let a stiff wind turn with the incoming tide and you'd drown. But they've moved the ancient name up to where a ferry now crosses the Suez Canal, and more than one good bible-student G.I. has been recognized for the world's prize sucker by the guide bandits and been taken there to shoot a snapshot to send home to Momma; and in Cairo there's an antique peddler who'll even sell 'em barnacled wheels of Pharaoh's chariots.

My patriot could just about read what I was thinking with my eyes screwed on the problem. "The name is doubtless," he said, "a symbolic pseudonym, conveying some such idea as the crossing of the Jews from slavery in Europe to the promised land of Palestine."

"So you admit it was promised," I said.

Sheik Ahmed Zahrab

"Unjustly," he quickly amended. "And without authority. Therefore we, being peacefully inclined, would like our implacable enemy to confer over the matter with us. Should he be unwilling to come, a man of your proven attainments is needed."

There was the unbeatable Oriental of it. A mixed Anglo-American commission coming to look into the problem; so this crowd would show up with hands as clean and innocent as desert sand, and any chestnuts to be pulled out of the fire were to be handled by some other monkey, and that was to be American Me.

I had to grin sardonic at the guy's cleverness, and he said quickly, "Pay for delivery of the man at conference headquarters will be one thousand pounds—in British gold!"

Woo-oof! They wanted him bad. I figured he must have been doing them a pretty fair share of the damage; and the night attack on his adjutant with the Citroen showed that his boys kept up to the mark with opposition movements.

I didn't like the deal, but a whole lot of things come along in my kind of job that give a fellow a feeling like gastric ulcers. Without doing any sums I could easily imagine that to go barging into the middle of this Quintara's gang and invite him out for a ride wouldn't be any community hymn sing. But there it was again; maybe he could lead me to the top hoodlum on that side of the story that the Sec'y had to know for his committee.

Damned if I wasn't beginning to feel like a patriot myself, sticking myself into the middle of the shooting so Uncle Sam's diplomats would hold the right cards as they sat on their plush seats over a mahogany table in some palatial neutral embassy. I told Mr. Snake the Sheik, "O.K., it's a deal. Where do I deliver?"

His eyes glittered and I'll swear his neck swelled like a cobra. He said, "Good! Ve-ery

good! There remains only to remind you of one of your own Americanisms: No tickee, no washee."

The funniest ideas they teach in Oxford about America! "Where is the joint?" was all I wanted to know.

He said, "The conference hall will be the house of Abu the Blind at the Oasis of Qasr-el-Azrak. I, Ahmed Zahrab, will await you." He uncoiled himself to go and he was pious enough to wish me luck. "*Allah yi afik.* God strengthen you." His adjutant opened the door for him and he cheered me with, "*Allah yisallimak,* God keep you safe."

I GUESS they knew I'd damn well be needing it. I knew this Azrak oasis; it was about a hundred miles from nothing on the ancient camel caravan trail to Kermansha, and Darius the Persian set up one of his road markers there with directions to his armies how to get back home. It's a great old post of red granite and camels and their drivers scratch themselves on it. Any sundown you might find a hundred sprawled nomad tents around there and in the morning they'd be like the poem says, "Folded their tents like the Arabs and silently faded away." A swell spot for a "conference" where there wouldn't need to be any archives put away in a safe.

I called for Cain and I guessed we'd better get out of Philadelphia before that zealous police inspector hampered my movements in his hoosegow. I took time off to run up to Baalbek and let Sadie see what kind of a mess she'd made me stick my neck into; and I thought maybe she'd have some ideas—and I meant ideas other than asking Cain's advice again.

We had to duck the folks, because they still thought I was a philanthropist with some money going round doing good for people; those good missionaries were the kind believed everybody was good until he was in jail. We sat on a stone bench made of Assyrian bulls with wings and it had to be under a moon that shone like a searchlight over the snow tops of Mount Hermon 'cause the folks thought it wasn't proper to snuggle off in the shadow. I tell you, it's difficult for a dick to get ahead with a mission girl.

I told her the set-up and she shivered and right then a hyena let go his idiot giggle from out around the garbage dumps that flavored the hot breeze, and she eeked and jumped close, and I don't know whether she was more scared about the hashish maniac or about the ice-blooded sheik. But she said, "It's horrible, Mike. It's like leading a man to his death. But any real American patriot would do as much and more for his country."

There it was again. Patriot! And she didn't have to tell me what a lot of dirt that word has covered in wartime as well as in peace, but if she could feel this chore was a noble duty I could feel better about it. After all, in my job I'd turned in more than one mobster to justice, and the way a dick gets to feel, what does it matter who liquidates a mobster?

"You'll have to go to Jerusalem to find him," Sadie told me with her naive wisdom and she had her immediate feminine quibble to salve the gnawing conscience. "Of course, when you get him to the conference, if that's not exactly what they mean, you'll have to protect him and see that no harm comes to him."

Gawd! Bodyguard one gangster from another! Me the lamb in the middle! And she had a bright idea all right; she put cap and seal on the conscience salve: "And the thousand pounds British that they pay you, you can write off from the taxpayers' account." She looked up into the moon ray through the fig tree like that picture of some saint or other playing an organ.

So I ask you, what could a guy do? All I'd needed was a little decent encouragement to throw the job up right there. But here I was sunk in it again up to my highest holster. She yearned for me. She said like she'd done before, "I wish I could help you, Mike. I mean, missionaries get a lot of underground information and I might find out who is the real organizer, your sheik's boss."

I told her, "It's unholy for a missionary girl even to think about it." I took her by the arm and led her right back to Pa and Ma in their verandah—I might just as well, with them watching their chick like hens over the top of their fence rail.

They were tickled beaming about my going to Jerusalem. Envied me my good fortune that my philanthropic work could take me where I could browse around over the sacred footsteps.

Goddlemighty! And me, each time I thought about my chore, wishing all the world could belong to some missionary order so a dick could settle down and enjoy some of this new world order peace that they keep telling us about.

CHAPTER III

FROM BROOKLYN TO BAHR-EL-LUT

THERE'S a lot of you will have been reading in the papers that the war is finished. Well, battered old Jerusalem is just one of the places where it isn't. Barbed wire barricades in the streets and British tommies with machine guns just wondering when a howling fight may start up amongst the mixed peoples of all the nations who crowd the narrow back alleys.

In Heiro-salem, as they call it there, I found

me a room with a respectable Jewish family that needed some rent money. Cain couldn't stay with me because, in spite of his name, I couldn't persuade them he looked anything like kosher. He had to go to the Suleiman Souk and he got to work with his defamation of my character. Nothing happened for a while, only that a couple of lads whom the family didn't know dropped in to make their acquaintance. Theirs, not mine; I knew I was being sized up by somebody more careful even than my sheik. And then one evening a man who could have been any nationality brushed by me in the

We sat on a stone bench under a moon that shone like a searchlight . . . I tell you it's difficult for a dick to get ahead with a mission girl.

Semmeh the Gun

street and said, "Der mann you vish to see iss at Beth-Hemosh."

O.K., I was sure he wasn't an Arab. So we went to the salt-cured little hell on the Dead Sea and I knew it would be a few million per cent easier to find a man there than in the warrens of Jerusalem.

The whole landscape there is salt. They pump the water out into shallow basins and it's so thick and the sun blasts down so hellish into its twelve hundred or so feet below sea level, that in a week they've got solid cakes of salt a foot thick. I asked a salt-encrusted citizen where I might find this Semmeh'l Quintara, and I took it as a compliment to the dumb look I wore that he took me straight away to a salt pillar that some bright lad had carved and told me that this was the genu-wine Lot's wife.

Never mind what their race is, guides are an infection that they catch from each other. I got my thumb into the hollow of his elbow and he yowled like scorpion-bit and admitted he'd never heard of Quintara. I told him to go yell it in the market place that here was a distinguished visitor who wasn't a tourist and the name was Marshall Mahan and maybe somebody had heard about it.

And nothing happened. Nobody sidled up to tip me off about anything. A week went by and it began to look like a run-around—I've gotten to a couple of big Hush-hushes of Army Intelligence easier—till I took a chance of turning solid like Mrs. Lot and went to take a swim in the Dead Sea. Not that you can swim any whole lot in it 'cause it's six times as thick as sea water. *Bahr-el-Lut,* the Sea of Lot, the Arabs call it, and you know, of course, if you ever went around with Mission girls, that it's salt because Sodom and Gomorrah are sunk in it.

So I was floating like a swollen pup when a jetsam of starved refugee drifted close. This one had a French accent. It said, "'E is depart to Joppa," and it floated away again.

Bedamned if my hunt wasn't beginning to sound like St. Paul, or whoever it was who went to Joppa. You know the place as Jaffa 'cause oranges come from it. Mission girls soaked in education know it because an old-time gangster named Perseus rescued Andromeda there from a dragon.

And so to Joppa, that's really the slums wrong side of the railroad tracks from the new miracle city of Tel Aviv. We gave my rep to Joppa and I hung around for another week before at last I made contact. Or rather, it made me, one dark night. And no fooling.

The door of my room eased open like ghosts and I thought it must be Cain with some furtive scheme. I said without looking up, "Well, what've you got this time, and why the hell don't you knock any time?" and there was no answer and I looked up and there was an alert looking, wire-and whipcord guy standing watching me, and I knew, just looking at him, that he must be my man. Nothing furtive or slinky about him, although he knew the sense of keeping himself well hidden from idle sightseers. He had a face like a horned owl, as hard and keen and his eyes were as big as yellow lamps. He stood and looked at me for a good two minutes and then he talked pure Brooklyn. He said, like reading a sentence from the dock, "We've cabled the States about'cha 'n we c'n find out noth'n. So what's the racket?"

And by golly, that gave me a jolt to the old self-esteem, thinking myself wise to all the mistakes that a chump can leave behind to trip him up. Who'd have thought this crowd would go sending telegrams around like the F.B.I. snooping about a Marshall Mahan who said he was a gunman? And I'd been giving credit to my sheik's crowd for playing it safe and under the board. In my kind of job a man's always learning some new precaution, else he doesn't last.

This lad kept his hand in his jacket pocket, like he was almost suspecting I might be trying to put something over, and it didn't need my experience to tell me that, if he'd ever get a hint beyond the thin edge of suspicion, he wouldn't waste any time on talk.

I told him, "In my job we don't register with the Chamber of Commerce. Who'd you ask over there, the Bible Society?"

He said, "Wisecracker, eh?" He was plenty sure of himself and he talked through lips as hard as a horny beak. "If you was anybody back 'n N'Yawk we got c'nections woulda known about'cha."

"Who says I'm from New York?" I tried to dodge.

"Ya passport, Dummy. We got a look 't it while ya snored."

That one knocked the esteem for a spin, and I knew damn well now what I'd suspected back

in that "respectable" family in Jerusalem—that they'd doped my coffee the very second night I was there. This crowd wasn't amateurs. The beak said out of one side, "Only that we got th' office yer on the blotter for gun work over to Irak, I'd clean ya off now. We ain't playin' chances, see? So what's ya game, come lookin' for me?"

I MOVED to scratch my back hair—this guy would likely know about a garter clip. I said, "Perhaps I'm a guy that's got some sympathies with your side and I could be sold on taking a hand."

"Sure ya got sympathies. Every decent white man's got sympathies." He started off the same as my sheik. His crowd was patriots, he gibbered, and their lives were dedicated to fight for their people's rights like any soldier; and he poured out his list of wrongs: They'd been promised the homeland on international treaty; and their compatriots had poured money into it, pennies collected from pushcart peddlers as well as donations from the rich ones; and they'd built the ground work for a Jewish state—look at Tel Aviv, look at Jordan Valley, look at Galilee and all over the Palestine map.

He went into diplomatic finaglings that even I hadn't heard yet. The Arabs had been shown what a progressive people could do with that barren land and they were kicking themselves that they had sold out their worthless fields. The Arab states had ganged up to bring political pressure on the European imperialists who were controlled by the oil interests. The British Empire that had horse traded for the Palestine mandate like the French had for Syria, and they both had their millions of Moslem subjects, didn't dare offend united Pan-Islam—and so on and so forth. And finally, if the Arabs were using gangster methods against them, all right, their own patriots would damn well fight back in kind.

It had me dizzy. All I could say was sort of weakly, "Well, all right; so you're needing a gun; so maybe your boss may think I'm worth using."

He flared round on me like I'd insulted him. "Who d'ja think's runnin' dis show? Me. No one else but me's the boss, an' if any punk don't think so I'm the guy'll show 'im."

My heart pounded right through to my wrists. In his excitement he'd handed me an ace card. The boss himself. So I'd be earning some of the taxpayers' money for the Sec'y's committee. Though what they'd do with it, I couldn't guess. This end of it wasn't any nationally organized resistance—it was just hot-heads and gangsters.

And then the guy's steam blew itself out and he cooled off. "But I ain't takin' chances with no strangers," he said, and his next cooled me off too. "Nossir," he said. "Li'l Sammy Kantor's the boss just because he don't take chances."

And did that send my pulses oozing back to where they belonged! Meaning some dark inner spot where nobody'd hear 'em stutter. Samuel Kantor! Semmeh'l Quintara! And even back home the Red Hook boys called him, Semmeh the Gun! What all I didn't know about Semmeh plumb wasn't. So he thought I was on the police blotter in Irak with a bad name? All the blotters in every precinct of Brooklyn had whole files on Li'l Sam, all the way from beer racket up to taking the whole Pinky Falcone gang for a ride all at the same time and leaving 'em bedded in cement in the Gowanus Canal. He was the toughest as well as the smartest gangster on the list and I'll bet more'n a hundred coppers were breathing easier since he had suddenly melted out of the picture.

And this was the "easy job" the sheik wanted me to kidnap and hand over for his stingy one grand in gold, British! Lone handed, right out of the middle of his own gang that knew all the snatch-as-snatch-can rules and the whole Brooklyn police force hadn't been able to book! I'd rather have gone out and kidnaped Perseus' dragon.

And right there I quit. I told Semmeh, "All right, big shot, if my credentials aren't up to your high standard I'll just say, glad to've met 'cha, and I'll forget I ever saw you."

"Ya'd better had," he said, and his beak snapped like owls do. "'S a matter 'a fact, punk, ya'd better up an' outa Palestine, back to ya Irak stamping ground where the game's soft. I'll give ya till t'morrow."

Me! Called a punk. Being run out of town! Me, Mike MacIlvain! It burned me so I came close to losing my head and drawing to see who'd be the faster. But I remembered I wasn't a cop with a badge and extradition papers and official help. I was nobody. I was Marshall Mahan, a gun on the wrong side of the fence, playing so under cover that there'd be no official embarrassments. If the cops ever got any goods on me they'd be as glad, pretty near, as getting Semmeh. I swallowed down a lungful of repartee I'd never learned at Sunday school and I just said, "O.K., O.K. then. Tomorrow, and I won't be sorry about it."

And sensible of me too. I was quitting. I'd write the Sec'y and tell him this murder epidemic was nothing that could be stopped until the international diplomats sent in an army to hold 'em down; and a sweet headache it would be for the diplomats over their port wine. Me, I'm just a dick who'll take my reasonable chances with dynamite, not a statesman who makes it.

I got Cain and we hopped the bus back to the City of Brotherly Love, only to collect up our gear and get the hell out. Back to Baal-

bek I was bound and I'd tell Sadie the chore was just too tough for a lone handed man and if she'd bawl me out about it I was all set to assert myself as a man; an ordinary one, not Superman.

And there at Amman there was a letter from her in her pretty copybook hand and it knocked me like brass knuckles!

It said, after some personal honey that doesn't concern anybody but us two, "You will remember that I have wanted to help you." My heart stopped beating right at that spot. I knew she'd done something frightful, but what? "I hate to think," she said, "of your dangerous work while I just sit and do nothing. So just think what?"—I couldn't think, I was paralyzed—"I received a most attractive offer to go out as tutor to two Arab children. It was too miraculously good for me to afford to refuse. So I've taken it and by the time you get this I shall be there. And, Mike, you'll never guess where it is—"

Oh, wouldn't I? I could feel it oozing dizzy like the first gasp in a gas chamber. I held my breath, as though that could stave it off. But I had to read what I knew was coming.

"It's no other, Mike, than your sheik at the Azrak oasis! And if I don't find out for you who is—"

I didn't read any further. I had all I wanted. The only thing I didn't know was how that cold-eyed cobra found out that Sadie meant anything to me, so he could go making her an offer too good to refuse and get her into his hands.

THERE was no bus line to that lost oasis. There was no taxi that would risk the desert. There was nobody who'd sell a car. There was nothing. But Cain came up trumps. He said, "If Master will cease pacing like a lion for but half an hour I will guarantee that I can find one who will dispose of a car."

I don't know whether I quit pacing. All I know is that within the half hour there was Cain with one of those charcoal-burning cars that they've converted to cut the high cost of gas. It rumbled with muffled explosions and sparks were coming out of its blower exhaust. Roaring to go.

I hung an extra gun to my belt and I went. Of course I knew damn well that Cain had stolen the crate, but I wasn't wasting time asking questions—I was going to see Mr. Sheik the Snake and if he smiled at me just once I'd shoot his fangs out one by one and call the shot. Cain drove, like a magician. I was so mad I'd have bogged to the floor boards in the first sand dune I'd try to take on the rush. It takes an Arab with an eye like an eagle to pick out the hard spots before you come to 'em—slam, bang, thump, over the empty desert that is flat only in the school books. Every twenty miles we'd have to stop and stoke charcoal while I cursed. About sixty miles into nowhere a tire went out like a fragmentation bomb. If there'd been anywhere to run off into we'd have done it, but our only road was direction. Cain cursed enough to give me a couple of pointers in the art. We humped along on three and a rim. We made phenomenal time—all the way to the oasis, a hundred miles, in eight hours.

And there at the house of Abu the Blind was my sheik. Waiting for me. And what did I do out of all the things I'd been promising myself? Not a damn one. He was waiting with a modern improvement on the traditional Arab hospitality, with some of the boys who had gathered for the "conference." One stood on either side of him, each with a Jeffries tommy gun—stolen from some British army post.

He said in his super-Oxford accent, "Deelighted to see you, old man. Our information service tells us that you have been working cleverly towards your objective. I'm sure you have good news for us." And he smiled with all his pearly white teeth and I didn't even have any throw-back vision of shooting at them. He said, "Come on in and have a cup of coffee and tell us all about it."

I choked out, "What have you done with that girl?"

He smiled with more teeth than any snake ought to have. He said, "Ah, a charming young lady indeed; and extraordinarily well educated, isn't she? The children adore her."

"Hand her over," I tried to bluff. "And if she has any complaint about as little as the cooking—" I knew I was talking like a goat. Any guy who thinks he can play a lone hand game in the East *is* a goat.

He said, "My dear fellow, I assure you she will have no reason for complaint when you see her."

I was down to begging. I said, "Well then, lemme see her."

He covered his teeth with pursed-up lips while he slowly shook his head like a judge considering whether it would be ten years or life. "I have been thinking, my dear Mahan, it would be better for our cause if you should not see her until you have fulfilled our little contract; that is to say, persuaded our political opponent to come to our conference table. An exchange of diplomats, shall we say?"

I could only gawp at him. His gunners stood by like he was MacArthur telling the Japs the next move. They couldn't understand a word, nor did they have to—all they needed to know was how to cut a man in half at close range. He pursed his lips some more. "In fact," he said, "I think it would be better for the general morale if you did not even attempt to communicate with her. Messages would have to be —er, censored." The pearly teeth came out

He said, "Come in and have a cup of coffee and tell us all about it."

again. "You see, we of the Orient have learned a great deal out of this war that the Occident assured us has been fought for personal freedom."

An idea was coming to me. He answered it like he'd done the first time I met him—before I got it out. "I can assure you, too, that her parents will not be instituting a search for her, because her innocent correspondence with them contains nothing censorable—nor will it, unless you should see her and give her unhappy ideas."

He had it right. Innocent. And she thinking she'd put over a smart one, taking this job with these master Machiavellis in order to help me out. Cain saved me from losing my head right there and losing everything else, blasting loose on him. Cain said, "*Ma takhiznish, Effendi.* Do not blame him. It is only we of the Orient who understand the little worth of just one more woman. It is true, we have found out exactly who is this Semmeh'l Quintara and where he is to be found. There remains but the difficulty of delivering him, since he, too, is surrounded by his bodyguards. With this additional inducement to my master besides the money promised, be assured, *Effendi, wa hayat abuya,* by my father's head he will be delivered."

I never knew one man could have as many

teeth as the sheik showed. He said, "Of that we are already assured, having, by the guidance of Allah, been enlightened to add the inducement."

You'd think he was talking off of a pulpit, he was that smooth and sure of the future. I could only wonder at him dizzily like I've wondered at pulpits before. Playing a lone hand—I mean the dummy hand, between two sharps who did all the shuffling! Cain maneuvered me out of there, punch-drunk with the wallops I'd taken one after the other in this deal.

We trundled back over the night desert and hyenas came out and laughed at us. I wasn't having any bright thoughts. I was the empty space between the old irresistible force and the immovable object. I said to Cain, "*Wa hayat abuya*, we're going to deliver him? By which one of the imps of Eblis, your father? Have you any master miracle in mind?"

He remained full of confidence. He told me, "Who am I to produce miracles? But it was necessary to get Master away from that son of the seven accursed dogs before Master would have had us both slaughtered like mad ones. And since Master has some small regard for that girl, he will without doubt devise a means for her rescue."

Lots of help, he was. As we began to reach Amman again towards early morning he was less so. He contrived a sprained ligament in his wrist from the wheel that kicked like a rodeo bronco and I had to take over while he crawled into the back seat and asked Allah to attend to the wheel's ancestors.

CHAPTER IV

ALLAH DELIVERS THE GOODS

IN THAT country it practically never rains; but with me it didn't rain but it poured. Right on the outskirts of Amman there was somebody else waiting for us. The police inspector, and with a reception committee, and he wasn't oozing brotherly love. He said, "All right, cully, we've learned a dashed sight more about who you are since our last meeting; and until I can collect some evidence I'm jolly well shovin' you in the caboose—charged with car stealing, and that'll hold you for a while, my Yank bucko."

The reception committee was a compliment to the reputation he must have heard of me—six of his *bolis ragili* armed with everything in their arsenal. And the terrain there isn't close-packed houses with back alleys where a guy, berserk crazy, might make a break and possibly get away; it's desert that goes nowhere with only one road out, the one to Damascus, and I could bet he'd have that covered too.

And me with Sadie to be gotten out of that trap!

I was so close to berserk I turned around to squeal on Cain, that I hadn't stolen any car. But Cain wasn't there! One of his devil fathers must have made him psychic about the reception—I wondered dumbly whether the damage to his wrist hadn't been a part of his precaution.

They frisked me and of course I had the goods. The inspector boy said, "You Yanks do jolly well go about it with the proper tools." He was feeling pretty good about it. He said, "Keep droppin' in like this, and we'll have your whole bloomin' party. We netted a brace of your colleagues just t'other day. Be needin' the new jail soon."

I put up my yell about a couple of guns being no evidence of anything, and rights of an American citizen and habeas corpus and all that; and he grinned and agreed, "You're dashed well right, cully. I hadn't got a thing on you—except this stolen car."

I wilted like taking a .45 slug in the diaphragm. All right, they couldn't hang me for the car—but what help was that? What difference did it make what they had me in for? Migod, I had to be out and fixing some way to get Sadie out of that cobra's clutches!

They carted me off in my own stolen car to the clink, to the old small one out by the water tanks that they've cleaned up for the "better class" prisoners—'cause, like their trains, the British have to keep up the caste system, and particularly in the East it'd be an awful blow to the old prestige to shove a white man in with the common roughage. They're building a nice new one even farther out of town to accommodate all the petty crook business that has been growing up in their Pax Britannica of this Trans-Jordan mandate that they whittled out of old Palestine.

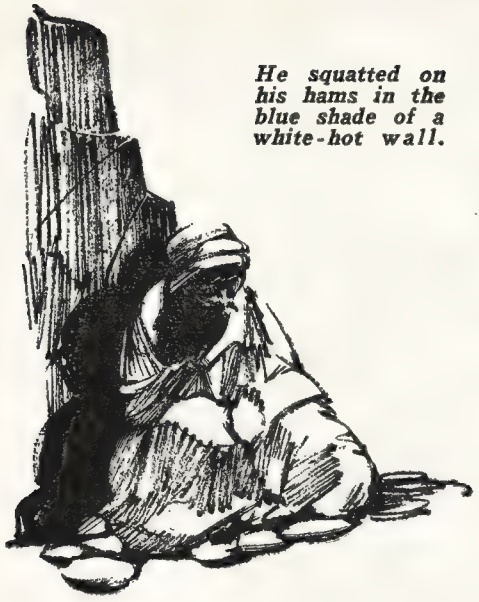
They put me in private quarters, a cell all to myself—no compliment to any cleverness I might have about getting out, but because I was raving.

I hollered for lawyers, for consuls, for telegraph privileges. I raised the roof and had the guards snarling. After two days I got up as high as the warden. He was an old-timer sergeant, bulging with meritorious service. He said, " 'Ere, me good man, yer'll 'ave to diminish this obstreperousness, keepin' all the other prisoners in a stew."

I told him, look, he needn't bother about me; but there was a girl, a white girl, being held in a den of crooks out at the Azrak Oasis.

I got as far with him as rousing a glimmer of interest in what was nothing new to him. He said, "Wot, is it another o' those there Middle Europe tarts in a 'arem?"

If I could have reached him I'd have strangled him. I howled at him no it wasn't a harem



He squatted on his hams in the blue shade of a white-hot wall.

but it was a missionary girl. He took that more serious. He said, "Strewth!" and he wanted to know where this place was. "They cawn't pull off any rannygazoo like that 'ere," he assured me. "There's British law an' order 'ere nowadays. D'yer mean they're 'oldin' 'er against 'er will?"

And what could I do but deflate? Limp and wet and my voice like a hangover. I had to tell him no, not against her will, but— But what could I tell him that wouldn't blow the lid right off my so blasted secret mission? He went cold official on me. He said, "I shall make a report of yer statement to the proper authorities," and he left me yammering at the bars.

Proper authorities! And in proper time they'd investigate, and every Arab sympathizer clerk in every office would know they were going to, and they'd get to the oasis and they'd find two peaceful nomads and twenty goats and ten camels and the house of Blind Abu going quietly about its business and they'd be ushered in to see Sadie and she'd tell 'em she was tutoring two Arab brats!

So what the hell, you'll want to know? What was I in such a stew about? I'll tell you what crawled cold up my spine and burned all the way: Sadie was in that snake nest trying to help me, finding out who was who. The big boss? The king cobra? And I'd give you just one guess who'd find out about whom first. And then what would happen? I can tell you that one too. I was learning my lessons by golly, about devious Oriental thinking. Sadie would write a letter home, saying the job was washed up and she'd be coming home next week with lots of money and a nice big pearl as a bonus, and there'd be a hundred witnesses who saw her start— And she'd never arrive! The "patriot" hands would be cleaner than a snake's belly.

I sweated. I raved impotent rage. I went mad.

IT DIDN'T help me any to meet my "colleagues" whom they'd lagged and see them taking it with Oriental fatalism. I met them in the courtyard during exercise hour and who was one of 'em but our Citroen driver of the Nazareth road again! He squatted on his asbestos hams on the sand in the blue shade of a white-hot wall. It's only white men who take unnecessary exercise in the East. He said, "*Mekhtoub*. What is written is written. If it is the will of Allah the Inscrutable that you and I are to hang, we shall hang."

And did that give me a jolt! Even though they didn't have any evidence on me—yet. I asked him what they'd got on him to hang him for. But he was as crafty as the sheik, his boss. He had gone on a mission, was all he'd tell me, and there had been a fight like at Nazareth and some men had died and he'd been caught. Kismet, it was his fate.

I supposed he must be one of their pretty important organizers to be getting into so many deadly missions. But so what? What the hell did he have to live for anyway in this cursed country? He shrugged into his burnous like a tortoise. He had only one regret, he said. He had collected some important information, and now, if Allah so willed, it would be lost.

His pal was fatalist too, but he was one of those people who had the faculty of religious faith. He wore a green rag on his head that said he had made the *hadj* to the tomb of the Prophet in Mecca. He was beautifully cocksure that Allah the Merciful, the Just, would not will to have them hanged. Their work was a sacred call enjoined upon them by Allah, he mumbled, his eyes turning up prayerfully in his head. Allah, therefore would deliver his servants. He sounded like the Bible.

I said, Yeah? And just how did he figure Allah was going to get us out of jail with a high stone wall and glass on the top?

He bawled me out. He said, "Infidel, blaspheme not. Allah the All Powerful can, if He wills, lift us bodily from out this jail; or He can, if He wills, equally easily lift this jail away from us. *Ma yihimnish*, the means is not my concern."

He was beautiful; he was sublime; he was a crazy *hadji*. I wished I could get that much comfort out of faith. All I got was a visit from the warden. He said, "Now listen to me, me good man. If yer keeps up raisin' such a racket 'ere we'll blawsted well shove yer into a straitjacket an' the balmy cell."

I guess I'd have been ready for it too. I was going nuts fast, sitting helpless while God alone knew what might be happening out at that hellish oasis. But it so happened I came close to getting converted. I mean, to Faith or—or something.

It happened during evening exercise hour when the couple dozen of us exclusive ones were out in the courtyard with the high stone walls that had no opening except indoors through a guard room.

I felt the sudden squeeze of air blast before I ever heard anything. And then there was too much racket to be really heard. What I did was feel it. The floor, the walls, the whole universe, shivered a hooch dance. Chunks of stone went sailing. I was arguing with the *hadji's* stubborn surety of deliverance. He was lifted bodily and slung away from me.

It was there that some of that basic training that they drill into you until it becomes an instinct showed its usefulness. Instinct made me spread flat and hug the ground. At that I was rasped over the cobbles like that Coney Island spinning disk that mixes up the boys and girls. Thinking, for the moment, was ahead of action that moved with the huge deliberation of a slow motion movie. I could see myself whirl and I knew that my head would be the part that would smash into the wall that was slowly teetering over and I could do nothing about it. And then a spread-eagle Arab spun into my orbit and I squeezed into him and he went on to hit the wall and it settled down over him and the rubble from it rolled to hit me in the face.

The smash of it across my eyes broke the slow motion spell. Rocks were raining, dust was choking, people were yelling—more people than ever had been in that court. The voice of Cain was shouting in my ear!

"Master! Master, you are not hurt? Can you walk, Master? O Allah the Protector, let him walk!"

Hands were under me, hoisting me up. I damned them, I could walk. The hands hustled me along, shoved a way through the howling, milling mob, groping through the dust. There were bodies under foot. We trampled over them. There was a head without a body. It was the faith believer *hadji's*. I giggled stupidly. Allah sure had lifted that jail away from him. The dust choked me with the acrid sting of an explosion.

And then it seeped into my stunned mind that, by God, it *was* an explosion!

Cain and the others shoved me along. Somebody smothered me putting an Arab burnous over my white-man clothes. The yelling was behind us. Cobbles under my feet. Whitewashed houses on either side of a narrow alley. The hands shoved me through a doorway. And then my reserve gave out and I crumpled.

I CAME out of it to the accompaniment of Cain laughing and sobbing and talking piously to Allah the Deliverer. I damned him; I was all right; I could get up without help. I did and I carefully shook myself. Nothing grated broken anywhere. My face felt like a camel had kicked it. And don't you ever let anybody tell you a camel's foot is big and spongy for the desert sands; the only thing true about that is that it's big and covers as much face as a man has.

"What the hell!" I said. "And how come all this?"

"The man," said Cain, "was a fool—for which, if he has survived, I will yet deal with him. He had been, he said, a corporal with the French ordnance of Weygand and he knew all about the making of bombs. All that we required of him, then, was a small hole in the wall, but it seems that he overmeasured his explosive—unless perhaps this British dynamite that we stole is stronger than that French stuff."

"Well, we'd better get the blazes out of here," I said, "before they round us up."

But Cain shook his head. "There has been," he grinned, "an uprising of desert nomads and a jail break and the police will be following all the camel tracks that spread over the wilderness from this place. Here we are safe, Master, for these new friends of mine know every cellar and crypt of the ancient city. There are four of them, Master, and they cost two pounds British per day."

"What is this?" I asked him. "Are you offering union wages around here?" But that was just a passing twinge of the old hereditary conscience. I wrote it off against the taxpayers' account and I rated myself high; I told Cain that my freedom was worth a contribution of fifty to Allah the Deliverer and I'd hand it to him to pay in to any mosque he'd care to pick. He said, "Yes, Master, but what proportion of the delivery did Allah do when he was handling it all by himself?" As irreligious as hell is Cain. No sublime faith.

But, just with four men. I was amazed. How was he ever mad enough to stage this break with such a forlorn hope? But, no, he said; there had been a small army, and he told me. He had gone hot-foot to the sheik, he said, and told him I was copped and it was up to them to get me out.

And what did the sheik do about it? He shrugged and said if it was the will of Allah that I should not catch and deliver this Semmeh'l Quintara to him, who was he to pit himself against the Inscrutable Will. That was how much he cared about me, and why should he worry? He hadn't paid out any front end money on his deal.

So then Cain tried to knife him, he said. But

there was enough of the gang around to grab and beat him up; and they were going to do him in, till he told 'em he'd picked up news in town that this Ashkar, this adjutant guy, was in jail too. And, well, that was something different again. They knew he had this information, whatever it was, that they wanted bad enough to do something about it. But how?

So Cain had his inspiration that saved his skin and he cooked up this plan to fake a Boston tea party of nomads with camels. Their own man, if he got out of it alive, they whisked away in a car, and what the devil an' all did they care about the others?

As slick as snake oil, and it left the "patriots" sitting all pretty and innocent again. They'd offered him a job with themselves, Cain said. I told him quick that the American taxpayers would be glad to double that fifty. Though I've got to give him credit—damn if I don't believe he'd have stuck with me anyhow.

But none of all that was clearing up my problem of Sadie. The very innocence of that crowd made it impossible for me to go to the police for help. And, migod! The thought heaved up and choked me. I couldn't even circulate as a free man. I was a crook, marked, booked. They'd have descriptions out for me in a couple of days.

They did too. Scared brethren of the underground brought down the news that the City of Brotherly Love was burning up with rage upstairs. The cops, the whole Trans-Jordan administration, were going around with blood in their eye. Blowing their damned prison was more than a jail break; it was sedition; it was rebellion; it was an awful smack in the eye of the imperial prestige. It would have to be "put down with a firm hand"—and that, in imperial language, never means anything less than hanging the ringleaders as a wholesome example to anybody else who might have ambitions.

WE lay low like rats in a mausoleum. I don't know what crooked business these old-timers had all been messed up in together, but they'd certainly built themselves a set of hide-away warrens with connecting runways to fool the ancient cops. Cain said they were cisterns to store the rain that fell three times a year, though I couldn't allow for old stone coffins with bones in 'em in cisterns. But, heck, for all I knew that could be just one other angle on queer Oriental thinking.

The cops came all right. They went house to house with a stern, "Open, in the name of the Law" and all that; and all they got was a fight with screeching women in every house. It looked like all the menfolks in town had a bad conscience for something or other and came down to join us in the vaults. We'd be scurrying from one to another of them in droves, herds, packs—what it is that rats have? And maybe there's some of you think a sweaty New York subway in summer can get to be pretty high, even though it rains in New York frequent and washing water free.

I wondered when the cops would have the sense to send a squad down to plug a couple of getaway holes and clean the runs in sections and I went near batty, figuring plans of how to get out of the trap and, more maddening yet, how to get Sadie out of her trap.

The gang couldn't see my anxiety. The news was that half the army of occupation was busy scouring the desert after camel tracks and the other half was standing nervous guard over "strategic points." And the gang grinned red-eyed, like rats who know how to bite, if cornered. There weren't enough cops left, they said, to raid all the cellars in force.

I gathered that this Pax Britannica wasn't riding so easy on the proud Arab peoples of the Mid East. But what did I care about Mid East problems? I had just one problem—Me! As desperate a problem as ever any paratrooper down and holed up in enemy territory. Stick my neck into a lone hand game for Sadie's innocent ideas about a patriotic duty, would I? So my noblest efforts got me rated as a crook with all the law and order of the land out to see me hanged.

And it was desperation that showed me some common sense at last. Where would a crook go to hide from the cops? He'd go to another crook who was smart enough to keep clear of the cops. And who would that be but li'l old Sammy Kantor. Semmeh the Gun who'd been bright enough and tough enough to dodge all the cops in Brooklyn.

True enough, he'd run me out of town and I wondered whether I wouldn't maybe do better with the cops. The only thing I didn't wonder was what I knew—that Mike MacIlvain had sunk to an all-time low in his career that had seen some pretty soggy spots.

How to get to Sammy? I mean, how to get through the enemy territory to where he'd likely be? Jerusalem or Joppa or wherever might be his current burrow?

Cain had his bright idea. Pick my passport that said I was Michaele Mirialis, a Greek fig merchant, and the boys would steal a truck and the necessary fruit and we'd put a bold face on it and Allah the Protector of the Innocent would see us through. And Cain also had a solid silver medallion of Saint Anthony that someone had sold him as a dead-sure amulet to bring travelers safely home.

I told him I'd seen nothing in the near past to bulge me out with any particular faith in anything but Mike MacIlvain's own bad luck; and I'd prefer to take the passport that made me Mastab Menleck an Egyptian astrologer, and

For a dozen blocks, we scuttled close to walls and ducked around corners.

we'd make a night sneak on camels across desert where there were no roads and aim for the Jordan River where they'd least likely be looking for us.

And I'd need a gun of sorts, something that at least would go off if I had to pull the trigger. The whole of underground Philadelphia laughed at that. Guns? It would give the military occupation a rash of nightmares to know how many guns were loose in their disarmed

and pacified mandate. Just be known as someone wanted by the law and it was as easy to select a choice arsenal as for any other crook in New York under its stupid Sullivan law. All it needed was money, and that was one break I got in all this mess. The cops hadn't connected my Mike MacIlvain draft on the town bank with this damfool stunt of advertising myself as Marshall Mahan, gunman. So the taxpayers could still pay my expenses.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE OF BLIND ABU

CAMELS, when you don't need 'em come and blunder over your tent ropes at night and go mad and wreck the camp and nobody ever knows who owns 'em or wants the damned things. When you need 'em bad, every one has as many mortgages and liens on it as an office building and costs as much as contraband guns made of solid gold. But what would the taxpayers care?

It was fixed for us to meet a pair of *meharis*—that's trotting camels, and they're studded with diamonds—at a ruined temple of Mazd a couple of miles out of town. The rat colony all knew it and half a dozen of 'em would sneak out with us to smell it out in the dark and to act as escort for a small consideration—about as little as though they were escorting Mazd himself.

So O.K., we crawled out into clean air for the first time in ten days. I sucked in a full gasp of it and it was as good as the blast out of an oven. A dozen blocks scutting close to

Those brutes will smell blood on the wind as fast as a Red Sea shark.

walls and ducking corners put us into sudden empty desert. You knew it in the blackness by the air that didn't taste of baked garbage.

Another half mile and I was figuring we were in the clear—when a voice yelled, *"Wikif!"* and a rifle bolt clucked wickedly and the voice grated out the formula in English, of a sort, "Hal-lut, or Ai faierr!"

Damned if they hadn't set up outposts, as jittery as though this "rebellion," as they called it, was going to be a new war!

We dropped flat on the sand—and it was like lying out on the oven top banked for the night. I shoved some money at the nearest shadows and whispered to them to go over and bribe the man shut. They melted off like ghosts. I lay and baked my belly. The voice kept on bawling, *"Beti milu eh hena?* What are you doing out there? Come in and surrender or I shoot."

The sand rustled and shuffled in the wind and I sweated; every whisper of them sounded like reinforcements running over from the next post.

At last the clamor suddenly quit. I spat sand out of my mouth and told Cain, "The fool is listening to reason."

He laughed and said, *"Tab-an?"* which is the Arabic equivalent of, Oh yeah? And then a hyena *whroo-oo-ed* its hunting call and I knew what Cain meant and I chilled right down in the hot sand. Those brutes will smell blood on the wind as fast as a Red Sea shark. Cain said, *"Balash!* It is finished. Those men were never ones to waste good money in paying a bribe."

Goddlemighty! There was another killing they could tie me in with! I heaved up and ran, blundered away into the dark. One of the underground rats who'd stayed with us because he had a hurt leg kept limping along and bleating that we wait for him. We had to too, while I had a cold belly crawl, looking for searchlights and pursuit—because we didn't know where the devil an' all that temple ruin was.

But the guy nosed it out all right and Cain said his pious *"El hamdu l'Illah!* Praise be to God!" For the *meharis* were there with a man who set to babbling a long account of so many bags of dates and so many skins of water.

I cursed him, and shoved money at him and we piled on and I'll tell you those trotting camels lifted their tails and trotted.

Come daylight, we holed up in a white-washed oven of a *serai* in Moab; and I came close to beating the brains out of a guide who came wheedling around to take us out and show us the very house where Moses died, that was still standing because it was holy.

The next night put us into the Zor. That's the deep valley of the Jordan that some high-brow writer said Dante must have seen in a nightmare when he described his Inferno. And damned if the flat barge ferry wasn't tied up at the other bank on the Jericho side, or I'd have made them run it right then and the hell with the wicked current amongst rocks like the Devil's black teeth.

But the luck held good till dawn and the contraption staggered across and I held my breath for twenty minutes solid, looking at Trans-Jordan for cops on the skyline—till we were on the other side and I could see the green oasis of Jericho shimmering crazy in the heat. I could have kissed the barren soil of Palestine as gratefully as any refugee that ever got out from under the Gestapo.

Not that I could whoop around as free as a bird, because this was British mandate too; only I figured that the Palestine administration wouldn't be actively looking for Arab ringleaders here. I wouldn't feel safe till I'd be in Lebanon or Syria where the French were too busy with crawling out of their own rebellions to bother about trouble in Trans-Jordan.

And the only reason I didn't head north at top camel trot was because I just had to see Sammy the Gun. The way I'd been figuring it out, Sammy was my only hope of doing anything about Sadie.

Cain took his turn at not liking any part of my idea.

"Why not," he said, "instead of this madness, go to her parents in the Lebanon country where we shall be safe and let them appeal for protection of the police?"

Cain talking about police protection! It showed how little he thought about my forlorn hope. I damned his dumbness. Supposing they'd believe my yarn against all the cheerful letters they'd have been getting from her, and did appeal. So what? It would have to be through diplomatic channels—French to British—and how long would that take? And those snakes at the Blind Abu trap maybe finding

out at any minute what information she was fishing for! And if the folks should write to her to hurry up and get out, why, that would just sign the warrant. And the sheik would censor it anyhow. Once clamp censorship on anybody and they wouldn't know any more about the danger they were in than any G.I. in a war. So then what?

Cain had to give in. He said, "Allah has given Master the wisdom. You have already said what would happen."

"And what may be happening any minute. So for godsakes let's get on to Jerusalem and get after Semmeh'l Quintara."

JERUSALEM was hotter under its collar than was Trans-Jordan and smoldering. You'd think revolution was ready to bust out with the first heave of a cobblestone through a store window. The Tommies at the barb wire barricades stopped you and had to see your papers like in a war zone.

But my passport as an Egyptian astrologer got us by—and down in those Philadelphia vaults where people didn't wash I'd grown a beard like Pharaoh. I went to the same respectable lodging house where they'd doped me and I told 'em to lay off the nonsense and let the boys know that I had something for Semmeh, and quick.

This time they didn't give me the runaround. They knew I rated as a crook. In a couple of days a guy with a beard like Ivan The Terrible came and said, "Gom vith." I was getting to be linguist enough in the basic English of Zion to know he meant I was to come along with him. He led me into the maze of gullies back of the Wailing Wall. That, by the way, was doing a boom business; the alley was near choked with people mumbling their worries up against the stones—and a couple of British Tommies to see that no unbeliever would come along and start a riot.

Ivan took me into a room upstairs of a store camouflaged as an Arab shoemaker's. He shut the door and went very calmly to a closet and pulled out a tommy gun and sat himself on a chair by the door.

I'd been thinking I'd be smart to come to this pow-wow without any guns, just to show my peaceful intent. Now I wondered. I said to Ivan, "What the hell is this, a ride?" He wasn't any linguist. He said only, "Vait." Which could have meant anything.

We waited about an hour and then the door shoved suddenly open and there was Sammy with his eyes pinched down like dimmed headlights. He wasn't any more cordial than last time, but he was a bit more respectful to my underground reputation.

"So ya got lagged, huh—an' got yaself sprung pretty smart. So what's this ya got for me? If it ain't some'pn I want it's gonna be just too bad."

Well, that was my gamble. My whole plan hung on it. "Persuade" Sammy to come to a conference, the sheik said. Well, I'd persuade him, by God. I'd gotten past caring if I offended anyone or not. I said, "It could be too bad for you if you don't want it."

His eyes half opened. "Is that so?"

"Yeah," I said. "It's a whole lot so. How much d'you know about a guy who calls himself Sheik Ahmed Zahrab?"

That got him all right. The eyes opened up to full glare. "Plenty!" He bit it off. "And all of it bad. What ya got?"

I gave it to him straight. "He's offering one grand, British, for anyone to find your hideout and put the snatch on you, and hand you over."

He let go a laugh like a screech owl. "Hoo-hoo-hoo-oo-oo!" High and shuddery. "Rates me high, don't he?" I gathered he was more complimented than mad. "And who's he think got guts enough around here to try it?"

I didn't tell him that I'd nearly had. He snapped his beak awhile on the taste of his brag and then he began to get mad. "The gall o' the bastard! Thinks he'll get me that way, the So-an'-So! All right, I'll call him. I'll raise him. I'll give that much an' fifty just to see his hideout."

"O.K.," I said quickly. "It's a deal."

He spun around and the headlights could have burned me. Then they dimmed down and he soft-footed close, his lips pinched white.

"What's your racket, guy?" His hand was in his pocket and I could just about guess the gun from the shape of the bulge—a Colt .45. "Where d'you fit in the picture? Come over clean an' quick, an' it'd better be so I can believe it."

It did burn. Me, being bull-dozed by a Red Hook gun punk. But I had to hold myself. I told him, "Look. This isn't my fight. I don't give a cold hoot who murders off who. I've got only one side and that's ME. That snake has got my girl, and that's all I want. And if you know anyone around here who's got the guts to go get him I'll tell 'em how, and you can keep your blasted raise and stuff it down a spout."

The lamps glared on me a full minute. Then he said just one word. "Where?"

I told him. He dimmed down on it and then he said, "How?" And before I could tell him he flashed the gun from his pocket. "If ya think ya kin bait a trap— Every road in that country's stinkin' with cops just waiting for me to show up. If ya—"

I pushed the gun away from in front of my face, and I could laugh at the conceit of him. "You think you're the only guy the cops want? I'm the guy they're burning their gas to get

We were made up for the part—we even had brass-bound rifles.

and string up. So I'll tell you how—if you've got the guts." And I told him.

THE way to get to the Qasr-El-Azrak, I said, would be to start from Tel Aviv and take the plane for Bahrein Island in the Persian Gulf where Standard Oil has a concession; and we'd have to pose as American oil drillers, and then at Jauf in Saudi Arabia, where they don't like British cops, we'd step out to stretch our legs and we'd get lost and miss the take-off; and from Jauf we'd get camels and come in on the oasis from the south just like any other wandering nomads.

"And," I sweetened it, "you can use your raise for expense money."

Sammy chewed on that a while and he turned up quite cordial. He said, "Buddy, you done some headwork there. That guy's got in my way for the last time." And the next second he was all ferocious again. "But you're comin' along, smart boy, and if there's any funny stuff—"

I told him, "You bet your life I'm coming along. I wouldn't leave that girl's rescue to any of your gorillas. She's safer as is."

It opened my eyes, how many gorillas he could round up. But I told Sammy what the hell, we'd have to pick boys who could pass as oil men, and how many seats did he think we could book all in one British Airways plane?

So he cursed everything British in fine snappy Brooklynese and he collected up a dozen of international triggers that just to look at they'd give the whole oil industry a bad name; and he knew where to get all the faked papers and identifications that you'd need for an army.

Cain said, "*Allah min afik!* God strengthen us! That good mission girl, were she to be consulted, would never countenance such blood-letting as I can already smell."

"She damn well isn't going to be," I told him. "She's been consulted enough. This whole business has grown from listening to her noble ideas."

There was only one hitch. At Jauf. Stepping off for an innocent leg stretch, Sammy's boys couldn't take out their baggage, the suitcases that held the fancier items of their arsenal. But they managed to supplement pretty well out of the Jauf black market and it was as salty a gang of desert nomads, all wound up in Arab burnouses, as ever made camel caravan out of that place, even before the days when King Ibn Saud discouraged the bandit industry.

It was a week's hike over the hottest desert in the Mid East. We saw a couple of other caravans, but we were strictly antisocial. A couple of scout planes buzzed nosing over us, but I'd expected them. We were made up all right for the part; we even had some of those brass-bound rifles with pearl stocks that the movies have all Arabs sticking out over their shoulders like tent poles.

We timed our arrival at the old lost oasis for after dark. I went on up to the house of Blind Abu with Cain and hammered on the door. A tommy gun looked through the grille before it was opened. The guy wouldn't let me in but he hollered back for somebody to call the *Qaid Asrab*.

The sheik came and stood in the doorway and he fair hissed his surprise through his teeth. My heart was up where I could taste it, won-

dering what I'd find about Sadie. I swallowed it down three whole times before I could tell him, "I've come to get the girl. And right now. Is she here?"

He nodded yes and gave me his cobra smile, and I tell you it was the sweetest thing I'd ever seen.

He said smoothly, "Why, that is what you said the last time you were here. Tut-tut, my dear fellow. You surely remember our little arrangement?"

I said, "Yeah, I remember. A thousand pounds blood money in exchange for Quintara, delivered."

He shook his head no and hissed inwards this time like regretting something. "Tch-tch-tch. I see you have forgotten. We changed that, didn't we? The girl against the man. I thought she would be so much better an inducement for you, and"— he hissed it out again— "so much more economical for us. A point, I assure you, to be considered in the apportionment of our patriot budget."

Sweet treacherous "patriot!" I said, "You wouldn't turn her over to me without him, would you?"

He said, "But my dee-ear chap! Be realistic. After all, as your people say, 'All's fair in love and war.'"

"Well," I said, "I've got him!"

The cobra did himself an Arabian Nights miracle and changed suddenly to a leopard, to a black leopard. His lips curled back and his nostrils spread and he crouched forward, his fingers hooked.

"Where?"

I reached my hand into the black shadow of the wall and, "Here!" I said. "I persuaded him!" And I pulled Sammy suddenly into the square of light!

The sheik sucked in one gasp and pulled another miracle. He turned into a devil, a tall thing with a Satan's eyes and thin hooked nose and white fangs. His burnous with the light behind it was yellow.

Sammy stood stiff in his shadow, looking like another devil half his size. "Yea-a-ah!" he croaked. "Here, you bastard! At last!"

THE sheik's tommy man got his wits first. He swung his gun up. Sammy had never mislaid his wits anywhere. He drew and blasted the guy. As clean and as fast as I could have done it myself. I smashed a fist into the sheik's adam's apple that rolled him ten feet down the passage. I plunged in and I saw to it that I stepped on his face as I went by. Cain was yelling to Allah behind me and the cursing and crazy laughing of Sammy's boys filled the passage.

At its end was a stairway. A tommy man stumbled down it. I took him fast before he could do any damage. My interest, I knew, would be upstairs. The rest of the Arabs, however many they'd be, would be spread out in the lower rooms and the cellars where it would be cooler. I left them to Sammy's boys. It wasn't my fight. I raced on upstairs.

Those places are never satisfied with less than a score of rooms. I pounded along passages carpeted like a deluxe hotel and kicked in doors. Empty! No women. This gang was gathered here not for pleasure. 'Round a corner I plowed, woo-oof, into a man coming hellbent the other way, and I nearly plugged him—and he nearly plugged me. It was Cain. He had the tommy gun of the stair guard.

He panted, "It was dead center, Master! The dog was in hell before ever I snatched his gun—and by the same token assuredly she is here, else why the guard on the stair?"

"Hold the stairway," I told him. "If anybody tries to come up, cut him in two; I don't care which side he's on."

Though no one was coming. Downstairs was a full sized war going on. The sheik's men and Sammy's yelling and poisonously cursing as they got their man or were gotten. Well, let 'em, was my policy.

I kicked in some more doors and about the dozenth there was Sadie, white and big eyed and holding her dress wide to shield two Arab brats who peered from behind it like scared lemurs.

It was exactly like her to be doing just that. I collected her in just one gasp, and barked at

her, "Are you hurt? Has anything happened to you?"

Her eyes went wider, all innocent and without a half a grain of understanding in them. "Of course not," she said. "Why, what would happen? But what awful thing is happening down there?"

For just a second I felt stupidly weak at the knees, knowing what awful thing could have been happening up here. "O.K., then," I said, "or else I'd have to go back down and get into the murder. Maybe you can teach me a prayer or something for it later. Right now we're getting the hell out."

She said, "Mike, when you talk like that I know you've gotten into trouble again."

I said, "Sweet Innocent, this is no trouble of mine. You and I are going out for a stroll by way of the window 'cause I wouldn't want your ears to hear some of the language downstairs."

The window was locked—they always are in those places. I smashed it out and lifted her out into the night. The brats set up a yowling like I was kidnaping her. She squeaked a couple herself as I let her down and held her by the wrists. "Hold your knees slack," I warned her. "It'll be loose sand and not too much of a drop." I leaned out all I could and let go.

She landed, ugh! I yelled back for Cain and I climbed out and hung, kicked clear and dropped. Sadie had the wind jarred out of her. I slung her over my shoulder. Cain catapulted out like he'd been thrown. He gibbered, "One of those accursed imps of the chief devil pushed me." I staggered off into the dark, my back crawling to feel somebody take a shot at anything that moved.

The house behind us was black like the seventh pit of hell. Somebody had shot out the lights and the boys were fighting it out in the dark, saving the gallows at Philadelphia a job. Somebody lurched into me. I dropped Sadie, turned to shoot it out.

It was Cain, laughing on the thin edge of hysteria. "They slaughter one another like angels and djinns, not knowing who is which—if indeed all are not true sons of Shaitan. *Ma lish da wa,* it is not affair of ours. The camels, Master, will be here to our left."

We shoved Sadie along between us. I didn't know why the hell I was limping. We found the camels by the smell of them on the breeze. Fumbled for the knee halters of a couple. They bubbled and yodeled like we were killing them.

Cain yelled as one of them chawed at his rump and he promised to slaughter it at first dawn. I straddled, hoisted Sadie up behind me, told the brute, *"Hai! Qam!"*—to get up and get going. It got up like a see-saw and plowed away, our teeth rattling to its gait.

From the house shots still sounded. The hyenas were already *whroo-ooing* around it. And my ankle already swollen up as thick as my head.

AFTER a while Sadie tuned her breath to the rhythm of the gait and wanted to know what it was all about and where we were going. I told her, "We're going to Qaf a week from here in the middle of nothing, because it's outside of where there are any British cops—if some blasted plane patrol doesn't get suspicious of us. And because at Qaf there's a Greek priest and he'll marry us quick, before you can hold me up to stick my neck into any more 'patriotic' duties."

She pondered that a while. And then she said it like out of a book from Grandma's time—the kind her folks would let her read, "Mike, you're so masterful."

To ME! Whom she'd made do everything that started all this murder. But it cheered me to think that maybe we were two minds with but one thought, for she seemed to be getting what was burning me up. She said, "Well, I did help you, Mike. I found out who is the big shot of that gang. He's Kaid Mansur Bin Ibrahim. So I did my half, didn't I?"

My skin crawled at the risk she'd run. I said, *"Purree Walad,* Angel Child, you did—and some day perhaps I'll tell you the easier bits of my little half. But it's your clever little sleuthing that winds up the deal. Because now I can cable the Sec'y a full report."

I did. I coded him the whole set-up—that the old East had gone modern and had gangs as good as any of our own and the rest of 'em were peaceable citizens like I belonged with at home and I wound up with, "So there'll be a lull in the scrapping till they get in some new recruits and elect new leaders. And what are you going to do about it? Get into a tong war? Where can your committee that's meeting with the British hand any blame?"

He coded back, "Problem apparently insoluble. From what you tell me, it seems to have been all your fault. But your valuable service at least gives our diplomats the whole facts upon which to base American stand."

Nice sense of humor that Sec'y has. As Sadie hasn't any—she's a woman. All big blue eyed she asked, "Does that mean he's pleased? Or no?"

I told her, "I'll cable him on taxpayers' money and say my wife wants to know."

He cabled, "Undeserved wedding gift airmailed."

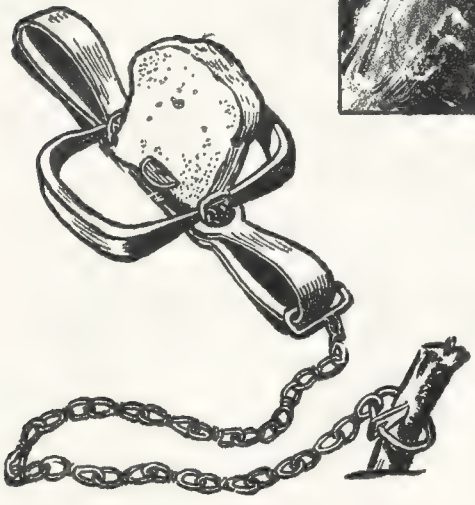
So Sadie is still wondering. What I'm wondering is which committee will outdiplomat the other? I've got my own guess. What do *you* think?

ILLUSTRATED BY
PETE KUHLHOFF

STAFF OF LIFE

By JIM KJELGAARD

He had gone scarcely fifty feet when the bindings gave way.



THE WIND was shrieking down the mountainside, and the trees bent obediently to it. Standing in the narrow valley, Alec MacVeigh wiped the sweat from his eyes, adjusted the straps of the pack that hung from his shoulders, and tried to see clearly through eyes that persisted in admitting only distorted, crazy visions. He turned to gaze back down the valley, and tried hard to think clearly.

He should never have left the base camp this morning. But this morning he hadn't felt badly. There had been only a slight headache and a great weariness. He had been tired before, and had shaken it off in a couple of hours on the trail. A man could not pamper himself if he hoped to take enough furs to make trapping worth his while. Alec thought hazily of the three fox and one marten pelt in the pack. It was a nice day's work. But—

When he tried once more to walk, he staggered and would have fallen if he had not caught a tree. Painfully he pulled himself erect, and a thousand little hammers began to pound against the cymbals which, unaccountably, had entered his head. He shook it doggedly in an effort to clear it. And all the while he tried hard to remember something that it seemed he should remember.

He was sick, he knew that. Furthermore he was desperately sick. Within the past hour his body had been robbed of its strength, his mind of its will. He should have heeded those little premonitory symptoms of this morning. He had not, and now he knew that he would never get back to his base camp. But there was something else—

Finally, through the whirling muddle that his mind had become, one thing was visible with startling clarity. It was the big hump, the mountain over which he was going to extend this trapline. Within the past week, up a tributary valley that led from the one in which he now stood, he had completed an overnight cabin were he could stay if necessary. It was small. But it was snug and well-stocked with wood. He had carried some food to it.

Now that he had thought of the cabin, it became the focal point towards which all his thoughts were directed. When he left the tree against which he stood, he stumbled. But he caught himself, and opened his coat to let the cool air caress his body. The cabin was an obsession, a dream goal that he must reach, and the one clear thought in his mind was the way to reach it. He was scarcely aware of frozen leaves crackling under his feet, or of the lowering, overcast sky. They were only incidental to the great sickness that sat like a heavy weight within him.

He hardly knew it when he reached the cabin, stumbled inside, flung himself down on the bed, and pulled the blankets over him.

HE DID not know how long he lay there. When he finally emerged from the delirium that had gripped him for two days and three nights, he sat up on the bed. But almost immediately he sank back down, weak from the fever that had raged through him and bewildered because he was here instead of where he should have been. Painfully he tried to reconstruct the events that had brought this about, but his last clear memory was leaving the base camp to start up the valley.

He stumbled to the fireplace, knelt, and applied a match to the already-laid fire—he had laid it the last time he left the cabin. Flame licked hungrily through the tinder, and crackled around the wood on top of it. Alec MacVeigh rested a moment on the floor and crawled back to the bed. He pulled the blankets about him while the fire's warmth spread slowly throughout the cabin. When he got up again he felt a little stronger. Slowly, as though he hardly dared do so, he went to the door and pulled it open. The full impact of the disaster that had befallen struck him like a blow in the face.

Outside was a white world. While he slept the snow had come. The furious wind had swept it from in front of the cabin—he had purposely built that on a hillside so snow would not pile too deeply. But the valleys would be heaped with drifts through which no man without snowshoes could hope to travel. Alec's frightened eyes roved all about. Finally he saw the one other living thing that was sharing this snowbound world with him.

A white rabbit crouched motionless under a bit of overhanging brush.

After a minute the terror he had felt passed, and Alec MacVeigh tried to reason. He took the water pail that was upended on the table, filled it with snow, and hung it on a hook near the fire place. As soon as the snow was melted, he held the pail to his mouth and gratefully gulped the water it contained. Again he opened the door to fill the pail with snow, and when he did that he saw that the rabbit had not moved from its couch under the brush.

Alec sat down on the bed while he took a calm inventory of the things about him. The food in the cabin consisted of ten pounds of flour, a pound or so of dried peas, a half pound of coffee, a little dried meat, and some salt. And he had the pelts in his pack—he could boil them and drink the broth they yielded. The rest of his equipment was what the cabin contained, plus his belt gun and hatchet.

He had to eat if he was to remain alive, and with that thought in mind he poured a small portion of the flour into a bowl, added water and salt, kneaded it into a compact loaf, and set it in front of the fire to bake. He returned to sit on the bed and ponder his problems.

There were two other trappers, Johnny and Pierre Thibault, near his base camp, and one or the other came over almost every night. The fact that he was away for a night or two would mean only that he was spending those nights in the mountains. But a search party would surely be organized if he was away for any length of time—probably one was in progress right now. That thought was uplifting until he remembered something else.

He hadn't told anybody about this overnight cabin. It was a full two miles beyond his farthest fox trap, and was intended only as a stopping-place on his way over the big hump. Trees concealed it from the tributary valley, anyone walking up that could pass the cabin without seeing it. The only possible way anyone else could find the place was either by accident or by smelling smoke from the chimney.

He got up to turn the bread so that it would bake evenly on all sides, the while he faced the fact that he must provide his own salvation. There had to be something he could try. Anything was better than just giving up and dying.

When the bread was baked he put it on the table to cool, then cut a slice from it and gravely ate. While eating, he thought of the snowshoe rabbit. He had better get it now, he decided, because he could not afford to overlook anything that might prolong his own life. With the belt gun in his hand he opened the door, and saw the rabbit sitting in the same place. He raised the gun.

But when he did that something else struck him, something cold and dismal, and he knew that he had not yet triumphed over the terror he was trying to fight. This was a lost and snowbound world, forsaken by all life except himself and the rabbit. A great wave of loneliness swept Alec, and he thought of all the miles that might lie between himself and any other mortal. Slowly he closed the door.

When he returned to his bread he was still thinking of the rabbit. And a great sensation of gratitude for its presence crept like a warm glow through his entire being. It was a companion. It was the proof he had needed that other things could live here. So could he.

Cursing himself for a fool, Alec cut a very thin slice from the loaf and cast it into the snow. The rabbit settled a little deeper into the depression that its own body had melted, and flattened its ears. But after a second it smelled the bread, rose on its hind legs, and wobbled its nose. Hopping to the bread, it picked the slice up and dashed down the hill. Alec watched it go with a sinking heart—he should have shot it while he had the chance. He spent the day lying gloomily on the bed. But just before nightfall he looked out the door and his flagging spirits took a sudden leap.

The rabbit had come back.

BY THE third week the dried meat and peas were gone, and a bare handful of flour remained in the bottom of the sack. But despite the constant hunger that pinched his belly, and the short rations he had permitted himself, Alec MacVeigh knew that he was not going to die in this cabin. And the snowshoe rabbit was responsible for that.

Except when it was feeding, it remained under or near the bit of brush. Every day, at noon, there had been one slice of bread for it and the rabbit had come to expect that largess. When it appeared, he always hopped to the bottom of the valley with it. There was heavier brush down there. The rabbit could remain under it, safe from any hunting hawk or owl, while he gave thorough attention to the bread.

The rabbit had become Alec's good luck charm. He had acquired the idea for his own salvation when he saw the huge pads on its hind paws—there was more than one kind of snowshoe. Clearing a path with the water pail, Alec had gone out and cut two slender limbs. He had bent them into shape, and lashed them with strips cut from the fox hides. Over them he had laced an intricate pattern of small twigs, binding them with strips of skin.

Alec kneaded the last of his flour into a loaf, and when it was baked he put it on the table to cool. The last smoking embers in the fireplace died, and Alec re-laid the fire. He might need quick heat the next time he came here.

Happily he fashioned a crude harness on the rough snowshoes, but just before he started out he sliced the bread in two and threw half to the rabbit. As always, the rabbit dashed with it down the slope to the bottom of the valley. Alec laughed. The rabbit had indeed been a good omen, a bringer of luck. Tonight he would sleep in his own base camp. He slipped his feet into the snowshoe harnesses and started quartering down the hill.

But he had gone scarcely fifty feet when the bindings gave way. The right frame snapped. Alec pitched forward in the snow. Rising, he disengaged his left foot from the harness and fought his way back to the cabin. Now everything was lost. He had no more food. The best pair of makeshift overshoes he could contrive was useless. Death was coming to him as it had come to so many who had followed his trade . . . and there was no sense in wailing about that.

Alec lay down and covered himself.

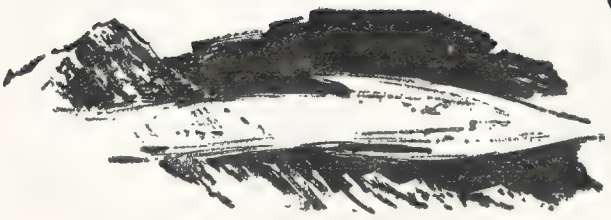
He was still lying there when, a half hour later, the door swung open and Johnny and Pierre Thibault burst into the cabin. They carried packs on their shoulders, had snowshoes at the door, and Johnny Thibault's Gallic face beamed a flashing smile.

"By gar, Alec! You one dam' hard man to find! Pierre an' me, we look for you t'ree week' now."

"How the dickens," Alec MacVeigh gasped, "did you ever hit this place?"

"We mos' didn't." Johnny smiled. "Pierre an' me, we jus' t'ink you might have gone over the big hump. We start over, an' mos' passed you by. But that Pierre, he see t'ings. Down below he see a rabbit in the brush an' say 'By gar, we backtrack that one.'

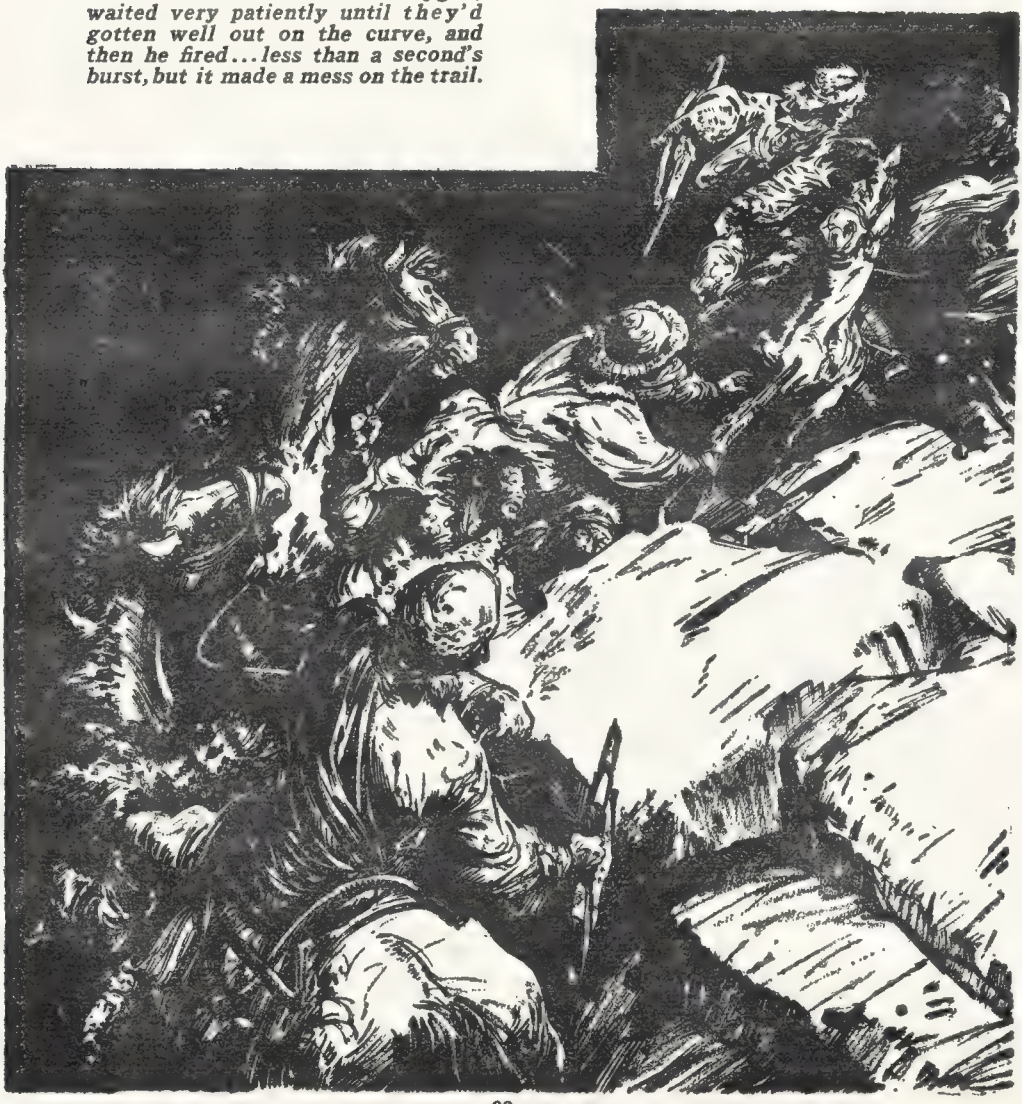
"It was eatin' bread."



WHITE

By
NICK
BODDIE
WILLIAMS

Rick leveled with the tommygun, waited very patiently until they'd gotten well out on the curve, and then he fired... less than a second's burst, but it made a mess on the trail.



JAVELIN

ILLUSTRATED
BY
HAMILTON GREENE

THE STORY THUS FAR:

WHEN the Air Transport Command's C-47, in which he is being ferried from his fighter base in Burma to a new one in Cheng-tu in China, crashes in the Tibetan Himalayas, COLONEL RICHARD HALE of the American Air Force is, so far as he knows, the sole survivor. Caught in a frightful, javelin-shaped cloud of wind and fog and snow which blows eternally from one of those lofty, ice-clad peaks, the plane is literally wrenched apart in mid-air. Parachuting to the desolate "roof of the world" Rick breaks a leg while examining the wreckage of the transport in which lie the crumpled bodies of the crew and passengers. Only WONG TEH-FU, a Chinese diplomatic functionary on some mysterious, urgent mission, is missing. There is slim chance, however, that he can still be alive.

In the wrecked transport Hale finds a photograph of a beautiful oval-faced, ikon-like girl. He doesn't know to which of the dead men it belonged but he appropriates it and it becomes a saving symbol to him on his long trek out of the mountains—the picture being his only contact with civilization. Stolid Tibetan natives whose language he cannot understand

fashion a crude litter for him and transport him back to Ambrugarh, his Burma base. Time and again these loutish, half-savage porters start to turn back, leave the crippled flier to be frozen in the hills, but Rick discovers he has a strange ability to persuade them to continue when he orates at them in portentous tones in his own language. He feeds them every fragment of poetry, every speech he's ever committed to memory, words ranging all the way from Mother Goose to the Gettysburg Address and after listening they carry him on.

At last, emaciated, babbling, half-mad, still clutching the photograph to which he talks incessantly, they reach Ambrugarh. From there, after a much too brief period of convalescence and recuperation, Rick is summoned to Washington. No reason is given the still sick man for the call and the base medicos are outraged that he should have to go before he's well but orders from big brass in the Pentagon can't be ignored. Just before he boards his transport for the long flight home a coolie, working on the air strip, takes three pot shots at him with a pistol. A guard kills the native before any explanation of the seemingly senseless attempt can be had.

Shaken and on the verge of collapse Rick arrives in the capital only to be discharged from the service abruptly, with no explanation of why he was summoned to Washington, or of his dismissal. Outside the Pentagon he is accosted by SAUL ALLERDYCE, fabulous behind-the-scenes manipulator of international affairs, who knows all about Rick's Tibetan adventure and tries to persuade him to return there on a mysterious mission. Allerdyce has a photograph of the same girl whose picture Rick found in the wrecked plane. He tells Rick she is TIAN SHAN, "the face of evil" around whom a great pan-Asiatic movement led by the shaman, OGDAI KHAN, is to focus. Russia and China both have stakes in the game of Asian politics. The former's interests, insofar as they relate to Ogdai Khan's messianic movement, are in the hands of GOMBCHIEV, a scarfaced bear of a man; China's were watched by Wong, who is presumed to have died in the plane crash. Allerdyce tells Rick he is the man to watch over American interests, which parallel those of peace-loving people all over the world, and that anyone who could manage to get out of Tibet as he did can find Tian Shan and when he does find her will "know what to do." It sounds crazy to Rick and he refuses to listen to Allerdyce, despite his promise to see that Rick will be taken back in the Air Force if he accepts.

Leaving Allerdyce's hotel Rick is trailed by a man he recognizes must be Gombchiev, the Russian. The guy slugs him and steals the photograph, leaves Rick draped over a toilet seat in the station washroom. Deciding to play along with Allerdyce after all Rick finds that he has been murdered in the brief interval since Rick left him. MARTIN WALSH, Allerdyce's man, who has been masquerading as Rick's taxi-driver, clears Rick of being implicated in the murder and arranges his return flight to Tibet, briefing him on the country and political situation. He is flown back by JO BRENT, lovely red-headed Wasp, and parachutes once more to the "roof of the world."

He is captured by Tian Shan's caravan on its way to join Ogdai Khan. The girl begs Rick to help her, get her away from the messiah. But he doubts her sincerity, even as she makes love to him, and when she shoots her Mongol bodyguard in order that Rick may exchange clothes with him and ride along disguised in the caravan, he knows she is playing some sort of double game. However, she helps him escape, and he stumbles off in the snow. Half-frozen, he slips into unconsciousness dreaming of Jo Brent, the red-headed Wasp, and realizes he loves her, that their amorous kidding on the long flight to Asia has been the real thing.

He wakes to find himself in a tent with Wong, the Chinese who he thought had perished in the plane crash, and in a minute Jo Brent is brought in. She has had a crack-up, smashed her plane. Wong, knowing that Hale is the only white man who can recognize Tian Shan, demands that Rick aid him in getting to her before Gombchiev. He wants to know how close Rick has been to Tian Shan, tries to pump Hale about her, and the flyer laughs in his face. He knows something has Wong buffaloed, that he has a winning card to play himself if he can only identify what it is.

Riding as prisoners in Wong's camel caravan they reach Sinkiang and the multiple ranges of the Altyn Tagh. There, at a half-drained mountain lakebed, they catch up with Tian Shan's caravan and after a brief skirmish Wong announces he has captured her. He sends Rick in to the tent to make the identification. Rick finds the woman sobbing, her arms over her face.

He attempts to comfort her, to get her to look at him, but before he can be sure it is really Tian Shan there is an earthquake and water from the lake pours down on the camp. Many lives are lost in the disaster, including that of the woman in the tent. Wong is sure Tian Shan has perished but in his own mind Rick can't be positive. The caravan pushes on and in a running battle with Gombchiev, who has also been following Tian Shan, Rick and Jo are captured by the Russian.

Gombchiev tries to pin Rick down as to the identity of the woman in the tent and doubts it was really Tian Shan. He pushes on trying to overtake the remnants of her caravan. Rick and Jo are kidnapped at night by Ogdai Khan's

followers and find themselves prisoners of still another faction. They are taken, bound, on pony-back to the messiah's secret hideout, Lou-Lan, an ancient, deserted city on the edge of the Gobi Desert. There they are brought, for the first time, face to face with Ogdai Khan. He questions Rick closely about what happened in the tent, knows that Hale had his arms around the sobbing woman there, insists on knowing why. Hale tells the fat messiah it was because she was a lovely woman. This goes over big with Jo, of course, and even better with Ogdai Khan. He goes into a hysterical paroxysm and it becomes apparent he is in love with Tian Shan himself. He leaves, frothing and vowing vengeance, but before the night is up planes come and begin to bombard Lou-Lan with bombs. Rick picks Jo up—she has been wounded by a falling beam—and flees outside to run into Tian Shan. She has a Tommy gun and orders Rick to follow her. The bombing raid still goes on.

PART IV

THERE was more than one plane. It took a while for Rick to realize that. So many things—this running through the night trying to follow Tian Shan along the walls and in the dark, constant watchfulness for Ogdai's men, and Jo Brent limp within his arms—so many things, half-seen, half-heard, but binding all of them, distorting them, the reaction of a man upon the ground toward a plane. Rick knew how plane fire overshoots. A hundred yards or so, strafing, was less than seconds' pressure on a button. A hundred yards seemed nothing in a plane. Yet to a man upon the ground, a running man with someone in his arms, a hundred yards meant miles of distance, aeons of time. Now, as he ran, Rick heard plane motors both behind and in front of him. There were at least two planes. Then he knew what he would have grasped instinctively at any other time. You didn't send one plane to do a job like this, or even two. You sent all the effectives of a squadron, at a minimum.

Gombchiev, of course. Despite that talk of his about the hopelessness of using cannon to combat ideas, this had to be Gombchiev, striking with everything that he could get. Springing the trap he'd baited with Jo Brent and Rick. Striking hard—for keeps. This raid was supposed to do the job.

But Gombchiev had failed. It was Tian Shan he sought, and she was getting out of it. Rick saw her far below him on the slope, working her way along the marsh edge through the reeds. Tian Shan was getting out of it—and Tian Shan was his—Rick Hale's—own way out. There was a linking there, a thing that had not hitherto occurred to him. The fact that only through Tian Shan's escape could Rick Hale find his way from Lou-Lan. *You get out only through a face.* More than a prophecy, those words of Allerdyce had now become a fact. It came to Rick Hale suddenly that this made mockery of other things which Allerdyce had said. This fact, suddenly clear, wiped out the line which Allerdyce had drawn so carefully, the cleavage of the evil from the good. Or was it that? Was it again simply that evil could be understandable, even acceptable, when it was useful?

Evil? Tian Shan, who was guiding him? It was Jo who now was making it so hard for him to get away. Jo, limp within his arms, a dragging weight upon him now. You cannot brand a thing, he thought: you cannot say that this or that is good or bad. You cannot do more than fumble with the morals of a thing. For to Ogdai Khan Rick Hale himself must seem an evil force. It was all crazy for all involved here were splashing around in circumstance, fighting to keep their noses up, fighting to live. Only the cloistered of this earth can say that this or that is evil. Those who fight, who struggle—

The marsh was sucking at his feet. Now Rick felt himself sink deeper into it, his knees splashing slime as he went wallowing ahead. He could not run much further with Jo Brent, nor could he keep Tian Shan in sight much longer through this darkness and the reeds and slime.

At last she stopped, standing there with the tommygun slung loosely in her hands. Behind them came the punching of another stick of bombs. The planes weren't going to leave a lot of Lou-Lan standing. It was a rich glow now, a roiling mass of fire beneath a cloud of dust, and somewhere in it would be Ogdai, thinking, planning, that fat face squeezed. Thinking of getting out of it, and of Tian Shan and Richard Hale and of a quick move once the planes pulled off. That wouldn't be long now. A squadron had only so many seconds' fire-power. With no supporting action on the ground, for the planes, Ogdai, tied down briefly, could move again.

Tian Shan was beating through the reeds. The ground was firmer now beneath Rick's feet. It was a sort of hidden island in the swamp. Four horses waited there, saddled, laden for traveling, only their hobbles holding them. Four horses. Now Rick understood. A horse for each of two of them, and spares, the only way to cross the desert swiftly. But none for Jo.

"Tie her across a horse," said Tian Shan. Why had she changed? Not pity, certainly. "You'll have to lead it."

Rick felt Jo's wrist. She was alive, and breath was coming slowly through her open

lips. He found no blood. Then, as he moved to strap her to the horse, he saw the lump upon the back of her head. One of the wooden beams the bombs had jolted loose had fallen on her evidently. He could no longer hear the roaring of planes. Only the grumbling of the fires that burned within Lou-Lan. Tian Shan was right. They must go now, or not at all. But not like this, not with Jo dangling crosswise in the saddle. He'd tried that. He'd come into Lou-Lan that way, and Jo Brent wasn't going to have any part of it. He shoved her upright,

SHE swung herself into the saddle, kicked her horse. They started moving through the marsh, away from Lou-Lan's fire and dust, circling away from it, first east, then bearing south. The horses, floundering, were going deeper now, the water rising over Rick Hale's knees. Tian Shan was out in front, her spare horse trailing by a rope. They went in silence now, not fast but doggedly. You couldn't hurry through that swamp. One misstep and you'd go down, and maybe—only

climbing after her, held her with his bandaged arm.

"Shove off," he said.

Tian Shan was standing by her horse. "I knew that you were stupid, but not this stupid. How far do you believe a horse can go with two of you at any speed?" she asked.

"This is the way we go," was all he said.

maybe—you would be able to scrabble out of it.

"He knew," said Tian Shan. Above the splashing of the horses he could hear her voice. "Ogdai knew all of it. Something you said about the tent on the Altyn Tagh. He believed that I had killed the man who parachuted into Tibet. But something that you said to him about the time when you were in the tent—"

"Who was it, Tian Shan? The girl who drowned?"

The submachine gun shifted nervously. Tian Shan's face was toward him but he could not see it clearly in the dark. Only the shadowed outline of it, oval, deep. That ikon face, almost religious-seeming.

"My sister," she said in the wonderfully cool, silvery voice.

They started moving through the marsh, away from Lou-Lan's fire and dust.

It gave Rick Hale a queer, sick feeling. She'd spoken with such unemotional simplicity, as if it were a natural thing. And it was not.

"I did not know the earthquake was to come," said Tian Shan. "I did not know she was to die."

Yet even if she could have known, Rick felt, she still would have done it. It was a final statement of the contradiction that was Tian Shan. He felt depressed by it as if he had uncovered something which was at once beautiful and horrible, as fascinatingly evil as the sinuous dancing of a cobra to a flute. He could not bring himself to look at her. He could only remember what he'd seen, the Mongol standing dumbly while she fired at him, and later that clotting up of men around a swathed figure on a camel farther up in Tian Shan's caravan, that little mystery which he had seen so briefly and had forgotten. Now he knew. Her sister—the girl inside the tent upon the Altyn Tagh—

"What did you say to Ogdai?" Tian Shan asked.

"I thought that it was you. I held her in my arms. She was so terrified, weeping—"

"Thank you for that. Perhaps it helped, Richard," said Tian Shan. "It was not nice to leave her there, but Wong was close to us. I had to make him stop. I had to have the time. And only by the margin of that time was I able to slip away from him, down from the Altyn Tagh before the earthquake. And from Gombchiev, before he set his trap below."

Rick felt Jo Brent move feverishly within his arms. He held her tightly as the horses struggled on. The mud and slime, the tepid water and the dark, the sucking of the horses' hooves and what Tian Shan had told him, all made the night unbearable. Only Jo Brent within his arms seemed of the world he'd known.

Tian Shan kept talking.

"We were together at the mission school in Su-chow. That was years ago. She was five years younger than I, but we were so alike that only by that photograph which you once had, Richard, could those who'd never known us tell the difference. The difference was the eyes. Only the photograph could have disclosed that she was not Tian Shan. We were in different classes at the mission school, and there was never any picture made of her. Ogdai knew that. Ogdai knows all these things, knew them before he took us from the mission school. The two of us, so much alike, were much more useful to him than one of us could have been. Always, when I was forced to make these trips for him, to prove the fact of Tian Shan, my sister traveled with me secretly. She was for such emergencies as finally arose upon the Altyn Tagh. If she were lost, Ogdai would have his answer. Not the real Tian Shan. My sister was—was blind."

Jo Brent was mumbling something unintelligible. Now they were coming from the marsh. Across it, glowering, the flames of Lou-Lan made an ugly, sullen patch. Tian Shan was turning south. They were moving

now with firmer footing. Rick's horse was going well, taking that extra hundred pounds without a break. A stiff trot now. A steady pace. The desert, rising blackly from the sink-hole of Lou-Lan, stretched on and on into the night.

"He knew," Tian Shan said suddenly. "When you said that you held me in your arms, he knew. You would not have done that unless something had gone before. So Ogdai knew I had not killed the parachutist in Tibet. He'd learned that Wong had picked you up, and all of it added so perfectly. I had helped you escape back in Tibet. I was betraying him. He had suspected that I would, if ever there was any chance. But with no choice for me—China or Russia, and the same old game—he had considered that the chance was not to come. Not here in Asia. That was the reason that he struck at you at Ambrugarh. That was why he blocked off your Allerdyce. He knew there was no chance for me to get away from this, forever, cleanly—unless it was America. You do not know what that word means—America. Refuge. New hope, another life—America. It is a magic word, a potent word. The only thing that Ogdai really fears. Did Allerdyce know that?"

Rick didn't answer. She was not talking to him now. She was, he knew, thinking out loud. Trying to guess what Ogdai now would do. He let her talk.

"When you told him about the tent," said Tian Shan, "he understood exactly what it meant to him. The time had come to rid himself of Tian Shan—the living Tian Shan. But he must do it in some way so that the myth of her would live. He must have that. He must arrange a miracle. That took planning. That was the reason he was slow to move. He had not yet decided what to do when the planes came, but by this time he knows we're gone. He cannot let us get away from him. He's coming now, raaching after us."

"Unless," Rick said hopefully, "he stopped a bomb."

She shook her head. "Not Ogdai Khan. Bombs do not stop a will like Ogdai Khan's. Nor mine."

CHAPTER XVIII

THREE—OR NONE

THE night before them seemed impenetrable, a soft, amorphous wall receding as they pressed into it yard by yard, yet never punctured, always there in front of them, retarding them, keeping them cooped within the glow that marked Lou-Lan. For, lying in the bottom of this vast, black saucer, it remained continuously visible. The black and red of it adhered to them, diffused by distance now, but still upon them as if Ogdai Khan, stricken, set back, were pawing out from there across the rising slope of desert after them.

Sand hills again, a great sea-seeming ridge of them, as if a surf had piled them there across the rising slope. They stood aligned, the clean edge of their summits silhouetted by the fire back in Lou-Lan. A tidal wave of sand that through the centuries was crawling up this slope, keeping that same alignment as it crawled. The look of it had motion in it. Frozen motion momentarily, but poised, bent toward the south, feeling its way toward the skeleton mountains that thrust upward in Tibet. Toward the continent-dividing Kuen Luns. Ten centuries, a thousand centuries, and it would get there. What was time?

The sand was in Rick's teeth. He felt the grit of it before he realized that now the wind—the wind of Sinkiang—was drifting it—a powdery mist—that blotted out the last glow from Lou-Lan. Now they were swallowed in this swirling night, a darkness that had touch to it, that you could feel between your fingers and your teeth. A choking coiling dark that bound you with the tiny granules that were emulsified in it. It was not a storm. There was no fury in the way it struck at you. Only the irresistible, relentless dragging of suspended dust, piling its weight upon your body, smothering.

Tian Shan had stopped. Rick eased Jo Brent downward, slid after her and knelt. The horses huddled close around them, rumps to the wind. Tian Shan stood watching him.

Gently, he slapped Jo's face. He kept on doing that until she moved. Tian Shan gave him a water canteen. He made Jo drink. He let her lie down for a few minutes, then lifted her and slapped her face again, his palms cupped so that the blows would jar rather than sting. The effect of it was irritating. That was how it was supposed to be. Arouse her combativeness—

"Don't do it, Rick." Jo said it thickly, out of her subconscious. "Don't do that to me, Rick!"

"Make her sit up!" Tian Shan's voice lashed at him out of the dark.

"I'll try," he said.

"Slap her again. Make her awaken."

Rick got the ring of it, that measured way of speaking she had used when she was urging him to shoot the Mongol in Tibet. Tian Shan was thinking toward some course of action now. And Jo Brent was the focus of it. Jo was in her way.

"Make her stand up. We're going now."

"We can't go now. Not in this wind."

"We're going now. Ogdai won't stop for wind."

"You knew that when we stopped. Why did we stop?"

"To change horses. Make her stand up."

She had the submachine gun in her hands. She was not pointing it. There was no threat implied in how she held it, but it was there, a fact that modified whatever he might think. So he must think very, very carefully.

"Come on, Jo, try," he said. "Stand up. On your feet. Get up and at 'em, kid."

"We're going now," said Tian Shan.

"All right," he said. "We're going now. Come on, Jo, honey. Up!"

He lifted her. It was like lifting at the sand that drifted down on them.

"Jo, baby, try! You've got to try."

Her head rolled back. She was a rag doll in his arms.

Tian Shan stepped close. Her hand flicked up, and then, savage, she swung it hard into Jo's face. The way an angered cat strikes at a thing enraging it. To hurt. To maim. To vent its fury.

"You *think* you love her," said Tian Shan.

Be careful, Richard Hale. Be very careful now. Don't answer her. Don't move. Ride this one out.

"You cannot have her," Tian Shan said. "I didn't bring you out of Lou-Lan for the girl. I brought you for myself. You are the way I get into America. Without you, I can get to India. But not much farther. And with Ogdai pursuing me—"

"I'll get you out."

"You say you'll get me out. How do I know?"

"I'll get you out."

"Kiss me."

"For God's sake, Tian Shan, we can't be playing postoffice in a jam like this. Ogdai—"

Jo Brent's legs suddenly were legs again, bearing her weight. She said, "Don't, Rick!" She rocked into his arms again. "Don't try it, Rick, don't go out there. Stay with me—"

Her mind was back in that hall in Lou-Lan remembering how he had braced himself to leap against the guards while those planes thundered overhead.

"It's all right, Jo. We're out of it. We're in the desert now and we've got to ride. Can you stand up?"

"I think I can."

"Try it."

She rocked unsteadily.

"Good girl!" he cried. "Now up."

Tian Shan's hand caught him. "Wait."

"Wait, hell. You said we had to go. We're going now."

Jo turned her head. He felt the tension in her body at the sound of Tian Shan's voice. A woman's voice—a voice she'd never heard—coming out of the dark, cutting at them.

"We're going now," said Tian Shan. "But I have got to know. And I will know."

"You're crazy."

"No, I'm not crazy. If I have nothing for you, you'll not hesitate to drop me when it seems convenient. And if that is the way it is, I can get out much easier by myself. I think," she said, "that you deceive yourself about this girl. Your loyalty—the things that you Americans make fetishes of. But I must know. I knew when I helped you escape back in Tibet—"

"Look, Tian Shan, I'm grateful for what you have done for me. In Tibet, again in Lou-Lan—"

"A man forgets his gratitude to women easily. There must be more than that. There will be more than that. Put this child on the horse. She's conscious now."

He shoved Jo up. She leaned there in the saddle, both hands gripping at the pommel, staring down at them.

"Now," said Tian Shan.

He felt ridiculous. He could not bring himself to raise his arms, nor move toward her. Then all at once that feeling of absurdity was anger and he seized her in his arms, wanting to hurt her for the idiot she'd made him feel. His fingers dug into the softness of her shoulders and he bent her backward, furious, far back until the taut arc of her body was no longer free from him, no longer unattainable in the wind and sand and night. He found her lips. His arms went tighter, merciless, and now it was no longer as at first, absurd.

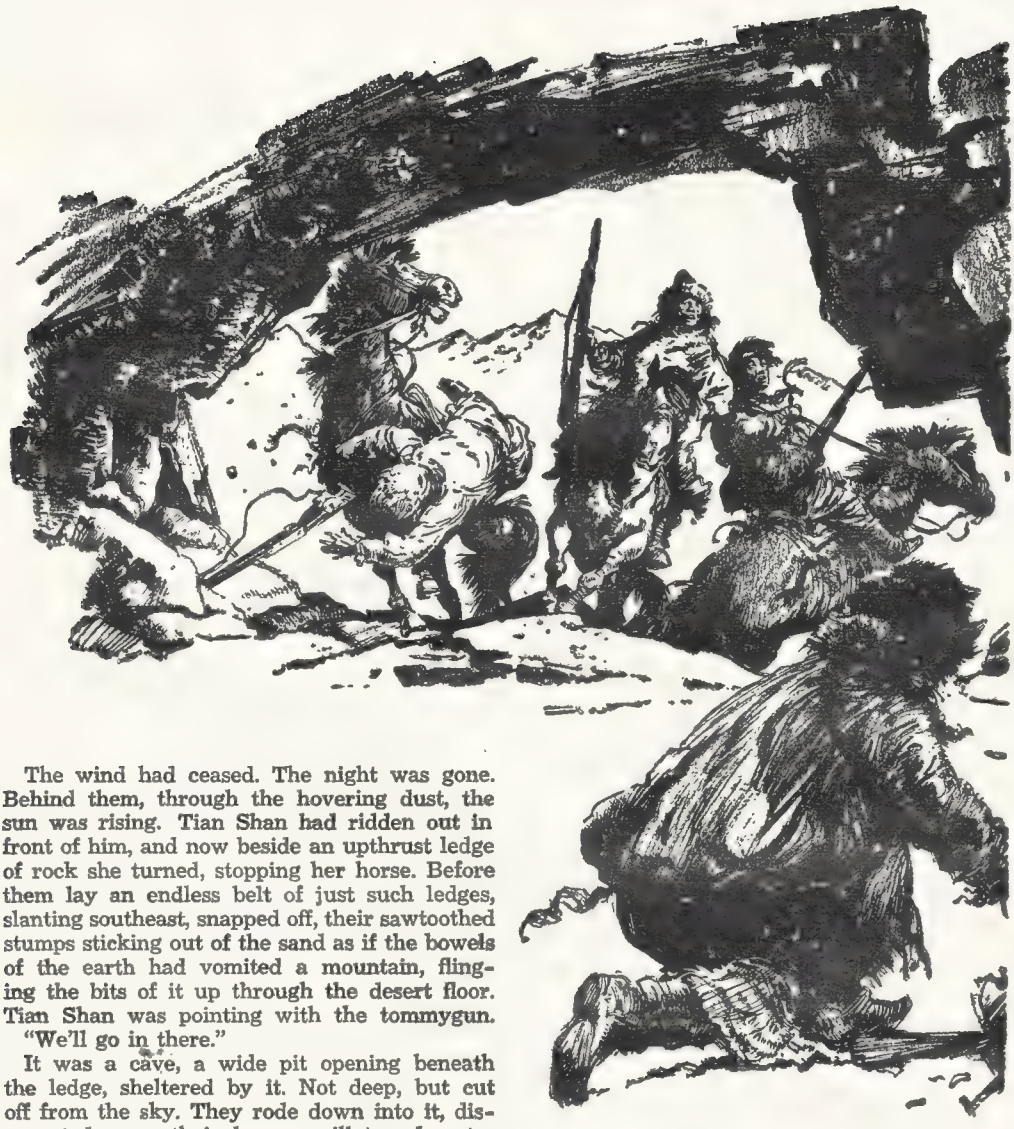
At last her fingers flexed into the muscles of his chest, shoving him back.

"We'll go," she said.

IT was a long time after that before he saw her face again. Throughout the night, she rode in front of him, feeling the way into the sand and dark and ceaseless wind with never-hesitating certainty. Jo Brent sat grimly silent on the horse with him, not speaking even when they stopped to change their mounts. Jo Brent, angry again, her chin drawn back, a little hard, defiance in her bitterness. Rick could not break into the icy crust that sheathed her thoughts. Nor did he try. There was too much to all of this. Tian Shan, Jo Brent, Ogdai, the wind and sand, the night—they fused into an enormous mirror for the chaos of his mind.

Tian Shan was now no longer just a face, lovely itself, but also meaning death. Not simply now the way he could get out. For now he knew that what he'd thought was dread of her was double-edged. To lose her and to have her—both were dreads.

And Jo Brent. In a frilly dress. He'd woven her through the fabric of all he'd planned. What now was different? Didn't he want the same things that he always had? To get his eagles back, go back to the States, loaf a little while, forget this alien world? But now, after this night—



The wind had ceased. The night was gone. Behind them, through the hovering dust, the sun was rising. Tian Shan had ridden out in front of him, and now beside an upthrust ledge of rock she turned, stopping her horse. Before them lay an endless belt of just such ledges, slanting southeast, snapped off, their sawtoothed stumps sticking out of the sand as if the bowels of the earth had vomited a mountain, flinging the bits of it up through the desert floor. Tian Shan was pointing with the tommygun.

"We'll go in there."

It was a cave, a wide pit opening beneath the ledge, sheltered by it. Not deep, but cut off from the sky. They rode down into it, dismounted, gave their horses millet and water and then stretched out, exhausted. Jo Brent lay watching Rick in silence.

"We rest an hour," said Tian Shan. "Then we go on."

"How far, Tian Shan? There's water in those saddlebags for one more stop."

She pointed back into the cave. Against the end of it were short, wide earthen jars. "Water and grain. The water will be bad."

Rick could remember that—the water would be bad, smelling of earth and tasting foul as in the relay stations when he'd ridden toward Lou-Lan. But it would serve. He asked, "We're going west?"

"Southwest."

"Toward the Himalayas?"

"Yes."

"We can't get over, Tian Shan. Two women and a man. It can't be done." He thought of Martin Walsh's map. "Due west is easier."

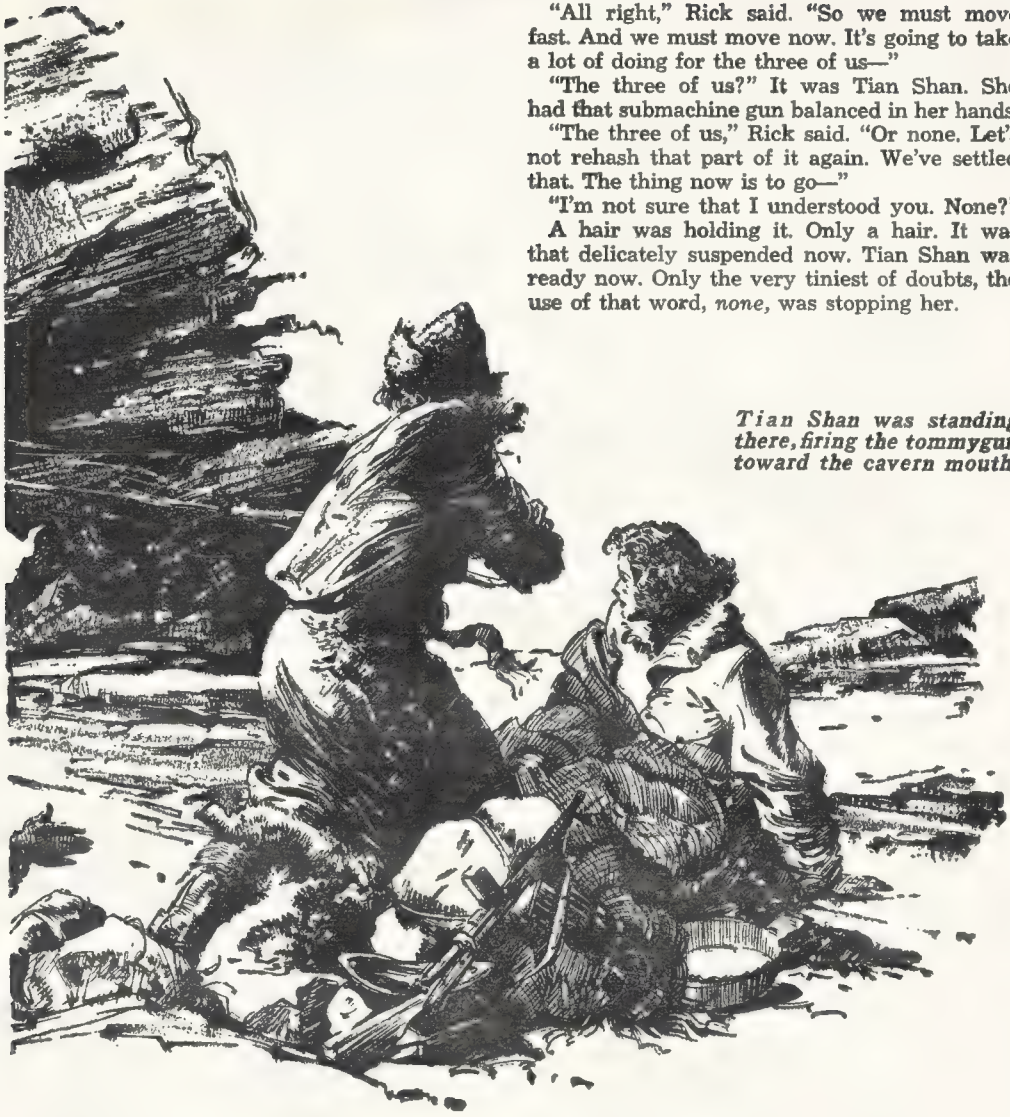
"That's Russian Turkestan."

"It's safer than the Himalayas."

"No. The worst thing that could happen for Ogdai would be for us to fall into Russia's hands. He's cut that off. But he'll move cautiously southwest. Wong has turned west."

"Wong was striking for Kan-suh—due east."

"When you were with him, yes. But now he's moving west along the mountains, trying to keep us from the Himalayas."



Tian Shan was standing there, firing the tommygun toward the cavern mouth.

"All right," Rick said. "So we must move fast. And we must move now. It's going to take a lot of doing for the three of us—"

"The three of us?" It was Tian Shan. She had that submachine gun balanced in her hands.

"The three of us," Rick said. "Or none. Let's not rehash that part of it again. We've settled that. The thing now is to go—"

"I'm not sure that I understood you. None?"

A hair was holding it. Only a hair. It was that delicately suspended now. Tian Shan was ready now. Only the very tiniest of doubts, the use of that word, *none,* was stopping her.

"You're guessing."

"No, I knew all of this before we left. Ogdai knew all of it. Wong thought that Gombchiev would prod us south—prod Ogdai south—and Wong would be there when we came. By now he knows it wasn't Tian Shan who drowned upon the Altyn Tagh. Gombchiev knows Ogdai had you in Lou-Lan. By now both of them know that we got out of Lou-Lan and that Ogdai is pursuing us. Wong will think that Ogdai will drive us down to him. They're striking for us blindly, all of them—Gombchiev, Ogdai and Wong—and so they must move cautiously. And that's our chance. We won't move cautiously. We must move fast."

"Put down that tommygun, Tian Shan. I'll tell you what I mean by none."

She did not put it down. She said, "Tell me."

Jo Brent was out of this. He couldn't feel her presence now. She must be there, but she was out of it. It was Rick Hale and Tian Shan. The last bluff, now.

"Because I'd kill you, Tian Shan. I know I'd never make it off this desert without you, but I'd do that. I'd kill you—or die trying."

"No."

"Oh, yes."

He had not moved. He knew what she was doing now. Considering in that deliberate way of hers how much of this he meant. How

much of it, and under circumstances she could plan, he'd have the guts to do. An accidental shooting, say. With Jo Brent dead, with Tian Shan insisting that it was an accident, what could he bring himself to do? She must be thinking that. No heat, no rage, no buildup in the instant it was happening—

"Well, chums, let's break it up. It's getting dull."

The drawl of it was much more startling than a scream could possibly have been. It was Jo Brent, a bitter smile upon her lips.

"Let's break it up," she said, seeing beyond them toward the entrance of the cave, "before the gallery walks out on us. Or worse—possibly worse—before the gallery walks in on us. Regard them, chums."

Rick whirled. He saw the horses first. Not theirs, but other horses, milling at the entrance to the cave. Three horses and three men, three very curious but cautious men.

Then all at once the cave itself was milling. Sound and fire and screaming and the horrible, wild shrieking that a frightened horse will make. A frightened horse, its rider tumbling downward to the sand, its bridle dangling free. Rick Hale was conscious that Tian Shan was standing there, firing the tommygun toward the cavern mouth, but what he saw through all the spinning, hot confusion of the moment was that one bridle dangling from a riderless horse. He plunged for that, leaped across the sprawled, chopped-up body that still screamed. He snatched the dangling bridle in his hand, swung on that while Tian Shan kept firing, moving forward, past him, out into the desert. Rick Hale, jaws clenched, using his good hand and his bandaged hand, clung to the bridle as if the thing were life itself.

WHEN Rick looked back on it, he wondered almost seriously if Allerdyce, who had foreseen so much and whose remembered phrases were becoming to him like phrases from the Scripture, open to varying interpretations, had foreseen that somewhere in Central Asia, at the mouth of a nameless and insignificant cave beneath a broken ledge of rock, a bridle would be dangling from a riderless horse. Had that been what was in Allerdyce's mind when he had said, "By then, you'll know what you must do"? For certainly Rick Hale had known, instantly and decisively, and just as certainly it was a turning point.

That concept, Rick Hale knew, attributed to Allerdyce a foreknowledge that was not less than mystical. No man, sitting in a hotel room in Washington—a man confessedly unsure about so many things that Rick Hale was to meet—could have foreseen that a bridle dangling from a riderless horse would break a deadlock which, the moment before, seemed possible of solution only through the death of one of two women. But Allerdyce, at the time when he was speaking to Rick Hale, was himself upon the grim threshold of death. The knife that was to kill him already unsheathed and Ogdai Khan was reaching out from Sinkiang, across the deserts and the seas and through the vastness of America, to strike him down. A man within that shadow, as Allerdyce had been, might have divined vaguely a circumstance, if not the facts of it, in which so very trivial-seeming a thing as a dangling bridle would mean so much.

These things Rick Hale considered in the days of pounding westward, southward and westward, that came afterward. Ten days of it, ten days that had their special kind of searing kind of searing drudgery, that were so much alike and so monotonously a time of looking back, expecting every knoll behind them suddenly to come alive with riding men, that afterward those ten days seemed an instant when contrasted with what happened at the cave. An instant, those ten days, when they reined up upon the long slope of the Kuen Luns, seeing at last what they had known must be there. Ogdai, at last. Closing his fat relentless hands upon them as the mountains channeled them toward the funnel through which they must pass. That moment, seeing him—for they were grimly sure, at once, that these were Ogdai's men—was itself drawn out by the tricks of their imaginations into endlessness.

Yet in those ten days, seeming all at once so telescoped, they had accomplished distances which at another time would have seemed fantastic. Rick Hale, remembering those maps in Washington, knew what they'd done. And possibly Tian Shan, to whom this flight meant life, could understand the impossibility of what they had done. Ten days of it, ten nights of riding south and west, stopping only when their fear no longer could compel their bodies to respond, and caught all of that time, between that fear that rode behind them and the fear that their five horses could not last. Creeping so slowly through the swamp mud of the Cherchen Dariya, haunting the arid southern fringes of the Takla Makan Desert, fording the ugly Keriya Darya, those rivers of the Tarim Basin feeding on the glacier-breasted Kuen Luns.

It was during those days and nights that Rick Hale learned the miracle of Central Asiatic horses. Feed them—stuff them—and they endured. They were like rugged little engines, needing only fuel, but needing that enormously. And only Ogdai's meticulous foreplanning made that possible. Those dumps of his, strung like the threads of a gigantic spider web through Sinkiang, now served a purpose of which he most certainly had never dreamed.

If Ogdai, coming after them, had required a goad, that fact should have supplied it, knowing that it was his own intricate planning which now speeded Rick and the two women toward the Kuen Luns. Or perhaps speeding was not the word. Crawling, perhaps, for always there in front of them, soaring gigantically, always so close, yet always so unattainable, a mass of blue and gray and granite reds and ice—a dream almost—the Kuen Luns receded.

Days and days of that. And nights. Ducking around the mud-built Turki villages, past lakes and poplared farms, past earthen heaps where Chinese once had clustered for protection in this empire that they'd owned—but never possessed—through the centuries. Day after day, hearing the hypnotizing pounding of their horses' hooves upon the graveled land, seeing the Kuen Luns, forever seeing them until their eyes and souls were aching with the promise of it, and yet never seeming to get closer. Crawling, not speeding!

THAT—all ten incredible days of it—seemed no more than an instant now as Rick Hale watched the distant, toiling band of mounted men who struggled after them, climbing this first steep slope. Ten days an instant now, while those few moments in the cave and those immediately afterward—those moments which had been the turning point in all of this—seemed quite as long as any single span of time can seem. He could remember now how he had clung with both hands to the bridle of the horse. He could remember how the pain of it had blinded him, how he had clamped his teeth, the stinging sweat of it within his eyes. All that, instants in happening but endless at the time, and he had thought, *A horse! another horse!*

That thought, ridiculously simple, was all that he could manage. What else the abrupt appearance of the three riders in the cave-mouth meant came to him afterward. He clung, dragging, a blinded man and with a blind man's desperation and intensity, while Tian Shan was running forward with the tommygun, firing as she went. And somehow as he spun and dragged upon the bridle, yanking down, forgetting things like hooves and pain, he saw, for all of his obsession and his blindness, Tian Shan limned by the sunlight at the cavern's mouth, that concentrated purposefulness of hers made murderously clear. And then she disappeared.

Just like that! A blinking of his eyes and she had disappeared. He heard, now dimmed, the wicked little clatter of the tommygun, and then the horse that he had captured squealed in rage. He looked up at it, seeing magnified its dirty teeth, its pinkish lips peeled back. He scrambled up then, seeing Jo Brent kneeling by the rider lying on the cavern floor.

"He's dead," she said, and that was all. Seconds before he had been screaming out his agony. Jo Brent got up, staring at him, and Rick knew that they both were listening. They could no longer hear the tommygun.

Five seconds, possibly. Five slothful, dragging seconds while they stared, hearing that nothingness beyond the cave. A tide of silence that was hot and smothering.

"Don't do it, Rick!"

He jammed the bridle in her hand. He shoved past her, then, running, plunged toward the cavern mouth.

"Rick, don't."

But he was out. A dozen yards ahead, Tian Shan was lying face down in the sand.

It stunned Rick Hale. It stopped him as if he had rammed into a wall. He felt the cold and numbing shock of it envelop him as he stood there, utterly motionless, and then almost involuntarily he searched the desert for the two men who had fled. It was the primal law. Shock or no shock, grief or no grief, rage or no rage, preserve yourself. Search out those men. Discover where they are.

Far off, marked by the wake of dust that spiraled back from them, they galloped toward the north. That sight, their act of fleeing with impunity, infuriated him. An overwhelming wrath welled in his throat, as if by roaring he could bring them down. Then all of that was gone, the shock and cat-like vigilance and wrath, and he was standing there and Tian Shan was lying prostrate on the ground.

He took a step, a slow and painful step toward her, then at last he ran, calling her name. He dropped upon his knees beside her, reaching for her with his arms. It was then that he saw her slim hands clenching in the sand. Flexing in spasms.

"I can't," she sobbed. "I can't."

The tommygun was lying underneath her. She had fallen there, untouched, but spent, all of her strength and will used up in that one headlong plunge, that final effort to bring down the two men who had fled.

Rick did not speak. His hand went out, touching her shoulder softly as she sobbed, and then she raised herself, turning her face to him, the dust upon it streaked with tears. A child's face now, the deeply oval ikon face, the face that he had first seen in the photograph. A child again, with tears welling.

"I can't get out of it," she said.

He felt the blundering futility a man feels when a woman weeps. He tried to find some word that could break through to her, but she was staring wide-eyed at him now, shaking her head.

"I can't," she said. "Not ever now."

As if imploring him to prove her wrong. Her lips, dust-stained, pressed suddenly together, bitterly accusing him. She wiped her face,

using her fingertips in sweeps that made a smear. She stared at him a moment more. "Don't you see, Richard? He's so close now. If I had stopped them I might possibly have had a chance. But now they're going back to him. Ogdai will close upon me now. He knows exactly where we are, and he'll come swiftly now."

Rick Hale got up. He pulled her roughly to her feet. Then he picked up the tommygun. "I promised that I'd get you out. Come on."

"You'll get me out?" Her lips moved with the sound of it again, as if it were incomprehensibly profound. She stood there with her arms limp at her sides, the fingers loose. Her chin was tilted up to him and suddenly there were more tears within her eyes. "You can't, I know. It is impossible. But if you think you can—if you want me to try with you—"

"Tian Shan," he said, "let's get the hell on out of here. Come on!"

She followed him toward the cave. Jo Brent, leading the captured horse, was coming out.

MINUTES. All of it had taken only minutes. But now, ten days and nights since what had happened at the cave, each of those minutes still retained the swift, bewildering emotions that Rick Hale had felt. And now, upon the long sweep of the Kuen Luns, seeing at last what he had dreaded all this time to see, those minutes came back to his memory.

Something had happened then to Tian Shan. It was not hope. It could not possibly be hope. It was, Rick thought, a sort of absolute implacability of competence. It was confusing that out of the same implacability she had struck down the Mongol in her tent back in Tibet, that she had left her sister there upon the Altyn Tagh, that she had crept beneath the scream of planes to fire point blank into the two guards at the hall door in Lou-Lan, and then again to kill the rider at the cave. Confusing now, to know that with the strength with which she'd done those things, she could look down the mountain's slope toward Ogdai's men completely unafraid. For in himself Rick felt the short, quick goad of fear.

She turned toward him. Until that moment he had never fully known how beautiful she was. Not in the way that women who were lovely were called beautiful, but as the final triumph of an art. Color and line and symmetry. Almost a mask, too perfect for a face. Too beautiful, until he saw her eyes. What he saw there, in the dark iris of her eyes, destroyed some things he'd thought.

"Not half a day," she whispered. "Richard—"

Behind her, Jo Brent's horse moved suddenly. A breath of wind caught Jo Brent's hair. A breath of it, and that was all, but Rick Hale shivered at the touch of it.

"Only half a day."

"Or less, Richard."

His arm clamped down upon the tommygun. He jerked his horse back to the trail. The sweat was coming quickly in his palms. He heard within his brain a high, shrill scream. Ogdai, closing. The pressure of him tangible again, as it had been back in Lou-Lan. The pressure that Rick Hale believed he'd felt, though never understanding it, though thinking always that it was Gombchiev or Wong or those thick, creeping tribesmen in Tibet, since that first moment he had seen the photograph. Always—always, he knew now—reaching out for him. And now at last so very close to him.

All right, so he was psycho! He, Rick Hale, had come so far to babble at himself. Pressure! And tangible! And reaching out!

It was a fat guy on a horse—a very nasty fat guy, sure—a very loathsome, ugly, murderous fat guy, but still just that. A fat guy on a horse.

They had half a day, or less. And they were climbing toward a pass that would go twenty thousand feet, that only Tian Shan knew how to cross. They'd not make that. Even without Ogdai to push them up too fast, they'd never make those twenty thousand feet. Look up at it. Lean back, Richard, and crane your neck and look. You see? You really won't. This is the one-way street you've heard about. And what goes up need not come down for centuries. As dust, maybe. Another grain or so to drift around the wastes of Sinkiang. Well, pal—

"Well, Jo?" he called.

Tian Shan was watching him. Something—

"There's no choice. Is there?"

"No, Rick."

"Ogdai or this. Well, let us be gay. Let's sing—"

"Rick, please shut up."

"Recall the blue Pacific, Jo? That nice flat island where we stopped and swam? The time when we were looking toward the shore and I—"

"Rick, please! It's bad enough."

He knew it was. He rode in silence after that. The three of them in silence, climbing steadily. The Altyn Tagh had taken two—or three, or four?—he was not sure how many days. And this was worse. This would take more, except that this time they would never reach the top of it. He had to keep on thinking that. Why couldn't it lie dormant in his brain? Why must he know how silly all this was, climbing toward death? When death was always so available. Jerk on the reins, pull sharply to his left, and there it was. And swift. One long, long dive, the way an airman ought to go, if he must go. Freezing was bad. Or was it bad? No pain, particularly, except—

Except you always played a hand out when it was your life. You couldn't quit. That was the

fascinating thing about life. It was like betting on the ponies—once it had gotten you, you couldn't quit. Mixing your metaphors a little, pal. The altitude, that must be it. Must be ten thousand now, maybe twelve. That high, there should be snow. But with the night, snow or no snow, they'd freeze. How many hours?

Tian Shan was pushing past him on the trail. "I'll lead, Richard. Ahead of us the trail divides. There are two possible routes across the pass."

"Tian Shan," he said, "we won't need all that half a day. It's less than that until night."

"I know. That is why we go toward the right."

"Lower?"

"Higher," she said. "Ogdai won't think that we have chosen that. If we can stop before we climb too high, there is a chance."

"How much?"

"It is a chance."

"Suppose he plays it safe? Splits up his men and covers both?"

"He will do that. But he, himself, will take the lower route, thinking that is the one that we will take. Some of his men will come behind us but if they should catch up, you have the gun."

"I've got the gun," he said.

"The gun can stop his men. But I should want more than a gun to stop Ogdai himself. He will not blunder into us. He will not blunder now in anything, for here, upon the Kuen Luns, his miracle must come. This higher route, this possibility of halting before we climb too far, is only what I said, a chance. Small as it is, it's all that you have got."

"That I have got?"

"Yes, Richard. You."

There was something in the sound of it which eluded him, which depressed him, and yet he did not want to pry into it. Whatever it was, he did not want to know. He wanted then, in that moment, seeing Tian Shan in front of him, only to get on. To get on with Jo and Tian Shan higher up on the mountain, away from the pressure which was behind them. From Ogdai, who would not blunder now in anything, who must strike now, at last, for keeps. That, the need of action, was overwhelming. Was all, Rick Hale believed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WAY OUT

AN hour was gone before they reached the forking of the trail and Tian Shan guided them to the right. It was much colder now, and as they passed along the ledge, the westward shoulder of it rising sharply up from them, the sun was blotted out. Rick thought at first that it was the mountain cutting in between, but it was not. It was a cloud.

Rick had got used to prodigious things, the mountains and the deserts, the distances of Sinkiang, but what he saw now, crawling across the infinitely far horizon, high up, beyond the peaks that leapfrogged back toward the crest, made these things puny. This was the cloud.

It rose straight up, the billows of it making a gigantic mushroom in the sky, more gray than black, and somehow much more sinister than blackness would have seemed. The gray that was like smoke, as if beyond the horizon the earth had gone up in a vast explosion, as the world might end. It was a column, climbing there, not spreading out, yet thick. Immense and indolent. It seemed to Rick Hale, watching it, that it could not climb higher. Such a mass must topple. Yet it climbed steadily, seeming in time to lean above them, dwarfing the mountain masses of the Kuen Luns.

The sun was gone. A great hush came upon the heights, a silence that could not be possible where there was soil or grass or trees or water. Only where all was stone. A hush made much more terrible by the small chipping sound of horses' hooves, as if pebbles were rattling down the stone sides of an empty, depthless well.

The three of them were moving now in single file, the two spare horses roped between them, one to Rick's saddle and one to Tian Shan's, pressing against the westward shoulder of the trail, away from the abyss upon their left. It was not possible for them to see much distance to the rear because of the continual twisting of the shelf, adhering to the mountain's curve, nor could they see much of the path they were to take. Only the peaks, innumerably jabbing up in front of them, and over them the sullen pillow of the cloud, shutting away the sun, bringing a silent, penetrating chill within its shadow. And then, so instantly that Rick Hale gasped, it happened.

One moment he was scowling upward at the cloud. It seemed then that it shuddered, all the enormous bulk of it, and then far up, something shot out of it. A shaft came out of it, racing toward the north, moving incredibly fast across the sky. As if it were a javelin of mist —a sheer white javelin.

"The wind!"

It was the wind, sucking the substance of the cloud into itself and hurling it, the way a Naga tribesman hurls a javelin, across the soaring backbone of the continent, back toward Sinkiang. Like that fatal cloud that had torn the transport apart. The thing that was not in the textbooks. There, above them, it was happening.

"The wind," Rick said again. Yet where they were, upon this shelf of mountain, there was no

breath of it. Only the silence of the spaces, chilled, oppressive now. "Tian Shan—"

Jo Brent screamed suddenly. Jo Brent's horse slid, its hooves making a frantic clatter on the stone, then all at once it stumbled and went floundering, its haunches down, its forelegs pawing wildly as it rolled. Jo Brent was down beside or underneath the shrieking animal. Rick heard the sudden popping echo of a shot.

The echo of it bounced at them from mountain wall to wall, diminishing, all in the seconds that the horse was wallowing toward the brink, and then Rick saw Jo Brent, dragging herself toward the shelter of the wall. Something pinged on the rock above his head.

The horse, now shrilling, pawing, its eyes distended, clung on the brink as if suspended there by ropes. Rick leaped down from his saddle. When he could see, the horse was gone. Jo Brent was lying motionless.

All this had taken not two minutes since he'd seen the shaft of wind. He crawled back to Jo Brent, dragging the tommygun and searching down the trail, trying to see who'd fired at them. As he got near, Jo's head moved.

"I'm all right, Rick. Keep down."

SHE didn't sound all right. She sounded sick. He inched his way to her, searching beyond her on the shelf, the twenty yards of it before it went around the curve. Behind him, something all at once made scrambling sounds. Tian Shan was whipping on, taking the horses with her, past the forward curving of the mountain out of sight. Rick heard the pinging of a slug on rock again. He flattened out and shoved his way past Jo, squirming into the rock. "It hit you, Jo?"

"No, Rick. It was the horse. I'm all right."

"Roll on you?"

"On my leg, yes. It's—numb."

"Broken?"

"It's numb. It doesn't hurt."

"Try moving it. Try with your toes."

"I can't."

"I'll have a look at it."

She made a gasping, faintly derisive sound. "You'll kill me, Rick. That bedside manner."

"Look, Jo," he said. "Don't be too damned comical. If your leg's broken, this is it. This will be where X marks the spot. Tian Shan's already gone."

He kept on searching down the shelf, holding the tommygun. "Well, Jo," he said. "Just thou and me, wishing we had that loaf of bread and jug. Left in the lurch."

"No, Rick."

"She's back?"

"No, she's not back, but she won't leave you in the lurch. You didn't think she'd leave you, did you, Rick?"

"Why in hell not?"

"You don't know, Rick?"

"Know what? Don't crack conundrums at me, Jo. It's not the time for it. Don't I know what?"

"Look, Rick! Back there—"

They saw him standing now, far back, beyond a second shoulder where the trail curved out. He had been lying flat, but now he was upon his feet, and running now, climbing toward them up the trail. He swung his rifle loosely, easily. He seemed so confident. Rick let him come.

"I want," he said, "the rest of them to show. I've got to see them first. Once I declare myself—"

"There, Rick."

"Yes, there," he said.

He counted eight of them, including that one out in front who now was running up the trail. Eight men in all, the latter seven walking now, leading their horses as they climbed. And none of those eight men was fat. Eight slender, agile men.

Rick leveled with the tommygun, not at the man in front but those behind. He waited very patiently until they'd gotten well out on the curve, and then he fired.

Less than a second's burst. It made a mess upon the trail. The horses were the worst of it, rearing, whirling upon the narrow shelf, brushing the men down in a churning mass. A horse ran full tilt straight out to the brink, then reared, its forelegs stiff, and plunged. The men upon the shelf were trying to get back, down past the curve again. They crawled and ran and fell, dodging the horses then and getting up. One man lay still.

The man who was in front stopped running now. He squatted suddenly, not falling flat but squatting on his heels, looking upward along the curve and poking with his gun, as if feeling with it. As if the gun itself could smell and see. He did not know what hit him next. He rocked, ridiculous upon his heels, then sloughing backward with his knees still up.

Rick dropped the tommygun. He crawled across to Jo. As he did that, he saw the sky again. The shaft of cloud was drawn out now from south to north, only the end of it which came out of the giant billowing gray pillow still remained visible. The other end was lost toward the north, beyond the last line of descending ranges that Rick Hale could see. Then he saw Tian Shan.

She came back down the trail alone, hugging the wall. When she saw him, lying beside Jo Brent, she stopped.

"The horses are beyond the curve," she called. "We can go on."

So that was why she'd gone, to save the horses. Rick got up then and lifted Jo. She tried her weight upon her leg. The ankle gave

The horse, now shrilling, pawing, its eyes distended, clung on the brink as if suspended there by ropes . . . Rick leaped down from his saddle.

beneath her. Rick felt cautiously. She winced.

"It's all right, Rick. Not broken."

"It might as well be for the use you'll get from it. I'll carry you."

"Until we reach the horses," said Tian Shan. "Then we must ride. They will send someone back for Ogdai before they attack again. We will gain perhaps two hours. Soon after night they must halt, then we can stop. Those two hours will be useful to us when day comes again."

"When day—"

Something had struck his face, something moist and cold. He turned, his palm up, looking out into the gorge. Against the wall that rose up from the shelf, they had not seen or felt it until now. They had been sheltered from it. Now, looking beyond, they saw the swirl of it. Still thin, not much of it, but snow.

TIAN SHAN picked up the tommygun. Rick bore Jo in his arms. All three went in silence back up the trail. They found the horses where Tian Shan had hobbled them and resumed the climb, still not speaking. The snow, not thickening, but bringing with it that first understanding of what the night would be, was like a drug upon their spirits. Numbing them.

Yet they had known. Rick Hale had known, hours earlier, how it would have to be. But then it had been half a day away. So much, a man will always tell himself, can happen in half of a day. They had not, then—none of them, he knew now—really believed what they were saying. Tian Shan, choosing the higher trail because Ogdai would go the other way. Rick Hale himself, waiting so patiently with the tommygun. And Jo?

He was not sure about Jo Brent. Perhaps she had believed they could get by with it. But she didn't often kid herself. She'd flown, she knew about those twenty thousand feet, and maybe in her hardboiled angry way she had accepted it. To do that, to accept it, took a kind of courage that Rick thought he lacked. Always, he had to kid himself that there was still a chance. And now, feeling the snow, the bite of it, seeing the first bleak little drifts of it, he could not do it.

"There's not," he said, "a prayer."

Jo turned. "There's one. There's Wong."

He hadn't expected that. He grinned at her. "Oh, for God's sake," he said. "My old pal Wong."

"Tian Shan said he was turning west."

"Maybe he did. It's too late now. Our problem now is altitude and snow. Ogdai is only incidental—only driving us to that. And Wong, if Wong is anywhere in this, is back of Ogdai, down the mountain."

"Still it's a prayer. I won't let go of it. There's got to be something, Rick. You've got to believe in something. And there's nothing else. Unless—"

"Unless?"

"I'm remembering something that Ogdai said. He was a horrible man, the more horrible for his intelligence. Something he said about you, Rick."

"I know. My luck."

"Your luck was what he said. But it's not that. There is another word for it, that Allerdyce knew. It's why he picked you, Rick—"

"It's not my brains."

"No, chum."

"Nor beauty."

"If you could see that beaver on your chin! No, not your beauty, Rick. And not your brains. It's more than that. Your doggedness."

He shook his head at her, laughed. "That does me in. Old Durable. Old Ironsides!"

"Don't laugh, Rick!"

He looked at her a long time then. "Yes," he said finally. "A prayer. Keep at it, Jo. Maybe you'll pull us through yet."

Her lips were taut. Tears dimmed her eyes as she turned away from him.

By then, the cloud that had obscured the horizon had flattened out, encompassing them. In that pervading grayness night came imperceptibly before Rick realized that day was gone. What had been dim was black. Tian Shan, a little up the trail in front of them, was halting, getting from her horse. They'd reached a great bend in the shelf, almost upon the top of this one range that they'd been climbing, and here an overhanging cliff formed a recess, open upon the side that fronted the abyss, but sheltered on the west and north and partly on the south. The snow was coming thickly now.

"We can't go on in this," she said.

And they could not. They could no longer see the trail clearly enough. They had to stop here in this recess that the cliff formed. The horses, hobbled, pushed their trembling flanks together miserably. Jo dropped far back against the wall. They sat there, aching from the ride, feeling the bitterness of it creep into them, but not for long. Tian Shan got up.

"There is one way to live through this. We sleep together, all of us, huddled together by the wall. With what we've got to cover us, it is just possible that when the morning comes—"

Jo said, "The lady lions and the lamb."

It was awkward—but they slept.

When Rick awoke he lay there blinking at the cliff above. Tian Shan was sleeping on her side, her lips apart, her arms around Jo Brent, and Jo was cuddled in a ball, her knees drawn up. Rick did not realize how cold he was until he tried to move. He couldn't manage it. He worked his legs, beating his feet upon the stone. When he sat up at last, he saw the snow banked deeply on the trail. He looked back

from it to the two girls huddling in their sleep, curled up in the numbing cold, like sisters, arm in arm.

HE strode out to the trail, going knee-deep in drifted snow. Beyond the shelter of the cliff, it piled more deeply, white with an undercast of blue and still more of it coming down, but not as thickly now. No blizzard. Softly and silently. The dreadful hush of mountain space. The gorges that dived giddily, the peaks ahead. And over all of it that grayness that was like a twilight of a world. So it would die. Born out of fire and spewing gasses, dying in silence, clad in ice and gray. So here, upon the Kuen Luns, Rick Hale could see the last day of the world. As it would be.

He was standing there, thinking that, and remembering the tremendous shaft of wind which had careened across the heavens on the day before. The javelin of wind, so much like that one that had torn the transport apart on the flight over The Hump—the sheer white javelin which he'd once thought was like the slim and silver beauty of Tian Shan— He felt something touch his arm. He did not turn. He closed his eyes upon the ice, somehow afraid, just now, to see. The last, the final day—

"You must load the horses now, and you must try."

It was so commonplace a thing to say. But how else could it possibly seem? What could Tian Shan have said, in that moment, caught as they were upon this wide space in the shelf, that would not have seemed commonplace? There was at least simplicity in it. And if there was in anything, in any word or movement now, the slightest sense, then that was it. He must load the horses now, and he must try.

"Yes, Tian Shan."

And then he turned to her. He saw something then that he had never seen before. The myth of Tian Shan, the myth of the distant mountain, the ice-clad mountain that men struggling through the burning deserts saw. The myth was ice. The myth was frozen unattainability, forever beckoning. A goal, a dream. But now Rick knew. The ice was snow. As soft as that.

"Yes, Tian Shan."

The myth was gone. Her fingers touched his face. He stooped, gently touching the coldness of her lips.

"Yes, Richard."

They stood a moment more. And then they moved back slowly to the recess on the shelf.

Within a quarter hour the attempt began. Jo Brent was riding, unable now to move the ankle that the horse had rolled upon. Rick went in front, the snow above his hips, pushing his body sluggishly into the drifts upon the shelf, not really getting anywhere, able to measure progress by the increasing numbness of his legs.

He had known how utterly impossible it was. At fourteen thousand feet upon the Kuen Luns, snowed in, without the equipment necessary for the foolhardiest of mountain climbers, and with another six thousand feet before the crest—six thousand up!—he knew exactly what was happening. He'd gone through this before. Numbness at first, and then the pleasant torpor that would gradually increase, making the fact of death a hazy, not repugnant thing.

He looked behind him down the trail, as if to fix it in his memory. Jo huddled on her horse, and back of her, Tian Shan, trudging along the path he'd made, leading the three remaining horses, pressing the tommygun beneath the pit of her arm. Jo looking bleak and miserable. No longer now the angry little Wasp, the bantam champion. A red-haired wisp of woman, helpless now. Like all of them. Helpless. Jo Brent!

He struggled for an hour. He had made a hundred yards. He figured that by night he'd make eight hundred, possibly. If night were now, it would be better to be back beneath the overhanging cliff, for if the snow should bank up on the trail, marooning them without the shelter of the rock, they'd not awaken from another sleep. And there again! The old routine again! Denying fact. Kidding himself. Trying to tell himself how best he could survive, when all the time he knew—he knew!—that he could not.

It was then that they reached the ice. It was an exposed point on the trail, where the western wall of it sloped very gently upward, giving no shelter. The snow had packed in firmly here, rounding itself into the contour of the mountain, so that there was no indication where the trail itself might be. But in that exposed position, where the wind could get at it, the surface had glazed over. Frozen hard.

Rick tried to jab his foot down through the crust. His heel, driven with all his weight, glanced off, twisting his body on his other leg. He caught himself, gasping from the exertion and surprise of it. He knew now that he had to find some other way to break the icy crust. He went back for a yard or two and fumbled in the snow until he found a chunk of jagged stone. He hurled this down upon the ice. It made a clinking, crystal-shattering sound, spun a moment like a gyroscope, lubricated by the powdered ice that it had smashed, then all at once it gained momentum and whirled out, shot along the contour of the ice, downward, then flashed out into the gorge itself and was, instantly, gone.

Some other way. The sheet of ice seemed to be not more than twelve feet across. Be-

yond it were the drifts again, soft enough for passage. But somehow, now, Rick Hale must chop a path across the ice. A path their feet could catch upon, and that the horses might attempt. For that was all that any of this possibly could be, an attempt.

HE tried a knife. It worked, but it was tedious. He had to lean there, resting his body flat upon the glassy curve that arced toward the gorge, digging the knife point down into the crust, chipping at it, prying small hunks of it away. And not too hard. If he should throw himself off balance now, as he'd done when he'd jammed his foot against the crust, he'd go, as he had seen the stone go, spinning out and down. This was going to eat up all those precious hours. This was going to take too long, for night—

Well, what else was he going to do? Sit down and wait?

The snow, beginning now to drift a little, shut off the gorge. He could not see the pit of it as clearly now. That much was good. Now he could concentrate. Dig harder, faster. Chip and pry, chip steadily, and pry and chip and jam the knife at it. See now, he'd made four feet of it. Not more than eight feet of it lay ahead. Then they could cross. With luck they'd get the horses past the slipperiness that was the ice, into the slow death of the drifts again. Then they could flounder on. A hundred yards, perhaps!

He was spreadeagled, flat upon the ice, digging at it, sick with the endlessness of it, when he heard Tian Shan.

"I'll go back, Richard."

Somehow, without understanding at all what she meant, the words infuriated him. She would go back! She could be so casual, saying that. She could say it so easily, while he was spread out, clinging, fighting stupidly against this ice! He started squirming back from it. And as the rock had done, his body spun. He caught his knees into the path he'd chipped and hauled himself back from the arc, then squatting there, sick to the very marrow of his bones. At last he turned.

Tian Shan had looped the lead horse's bridle on a point of rock. And she was going back.

"Tian Shan, damn you! What in the name of God—"

She turned. "You must have time."

"Time's what I've got. Come back. We've got to stick together in this snow. Come back!"

He had to make those four feet back, get off the ice into the snow again, go after her and stop her now from what was happening to her. Tian Shan! Tian Shan—

The wind was pressing him. It was a gust, making him rock upon his gripping feet. The curtain of the snow was lifted suddenly. There, the gorge. There, the trail upon the shelf, and Tian Shan moving so resolutely down, and far beyond her, down where the trail curved out again, he saw a moving blob of darkness on the snow, a blob that struggled on alone, coming breast-deep into the drifts upon the trail. Coming relentlessly.

Rick was across the ice and he was lifting Jo Brent. He had her in his arms, down from her horse, then back against the westward wall of the shelf and down. The wind, blowing her copper hair across her eyes, sifting the crystals of the snow upon her lashes as she stared at him, now suddenly was shrieking in the gorge, and far down from them he saw Tian Shan drop to the snow. He saw the tommygun thrust out from her, pointing down the trail. The blob of darkness, seeming enormous now, was coming on. And then above the wind itself he heard the guttering of the tommygun.

"I'm going, Jo."

She touched his eyes. Her fingers had an icy feel, as if death were caressing him.

"Damn it, Jo, I've got to go. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You'll be safe here."

"Yes, Rick."

"Stay down. Stay flat against the wall."

"Yes, Rick. It's all right."

"All right." He pushed himself erect. "All right," he said. "Don't hate me, Jo."

"I love you, Rick. Go on."

HE wanted to say something more. Something that he could not get straight inside his head. But then the wind came screaming back into his mouth. The curtain of the snow was whirled awry, and down below he saw the blob of darkness crawling through the drifts. Crawling obscenely, injured, as a blind thing crawls. But never for an instant lessening its pace. A terrible, indomitable thing. A dark force—Asiatic in the patience of its struggle—that had to be recognized and met—now!

At last Rick had to move on Ogdai Khan, not waiting now, not being kicked about and dodging any longer. He shoved into the wind.

He heard the tommygun again. He saw Tian Shan, still lying flat upon the snow, but now not firing in a burst, but steadily, the roll of it increasing toward a roar. The sound of it seemed much too loud. Grinding. A trick of wind and ice and gorge—

The blob had stopped. The blob, enormous, spun around. It flattened out, bounced up, and flattened out again, moving in crazy, panic-stricken jerks. And then the screaming of the wind was lost in shattering thunder.

Rick saw it then. He had those seconds to perceive the powder that rose up from it, the black and ugly mass of it, the awing frightful-

ness of it, rushing, plunging, gulping the mountain's face as it came down. The blob, flat in the path of it, lay still at last.

Tian Shan was up. She whirled and ran, back up the trail, three strides, four agonizing strides, and then she whirled again, now down the trail, now staring wildly up the mountain's westward slope into the roaring, rushing mass, backing from it, both hands outstretched as if to blot it out. Cut off by it.

Rick went in front, struggling through snow above his hips. In an hour he made a hundred yards.

A moment more. She was upon the brink of the abyss. She turned, seeming to do it very slowly, stiffly. Turned to the gorge. Face out toward it. The blackness of the avalanche was now upon her, not the engulfing mass itself but its foreshadow. Her body tensed. She tried to turn again. Rick saw her face, the terror of it now, the open, crying, calling motion of her mouth, as if she called to him, as if once more he heard that silvery, cool timbre of her voice.

Tian Shan! Tian Shan!

And then she plunged. She flicked out into space as if hurled out. A gleam of her, a flash against the blackness of the gorge. And then the avalanche.

How long Rick Hale stood there he did not know. Perhaps not long. But climbing to Jo Brent he was to remember as infinity. Climbing to Jo, and lifting her within his arms, and walking down the trail again to that wide space upon the shelf, beneath the overhanging cliff, and all the hours that they were there, silent, waiting, no longer trying now. But waiting very patiently. Waiting, until—

Out of the blackness of his senses Rick was sure he recognized the face. It took a while. He was not getting any closer to reality. A dream, a grain of sand, a silver javelin, a face, a way he could get out! But this face seemed to be the face of Martin Walsh. Bearded and stiff, screwed up with tensity, and tensity had never seemed a part of Martin Walsh. But still, it had the look of him.

Was it? But it was asking too much of his brain, to make a decision. Grateful, he felt the blackness swallowing him into itself again.

CHAPTER XX

A PAIR OF EAGLES

IT was cool in that room in Srinagar, and the efficient movements of the Kashmiri houseboys, adept with soda, made it seem cooler still. There was nothing like efficiency to fend off the heat. Rick Hale, in whites, lay face up on the sofa, holding his glass so that the sunlight from the windows was refracted through the ice. It was good to look at ice again without feeling the substance of his bones congeal. He was getting used to it. He was going, some day, actually to enjoy ice again.

"Then you are positive," said Gombchiev, "that it engulfed him?"

"I'm positive," Rick said. He edged around to look at Gombchiev. "As sure—"

"As death and taxes," Gombchiev volunteered, closing his one good eye. His ponderous lips tightened with amusement at his own remark.

"As taxes, anyway," said Rick. "Death is not sure." He raised himself upon the sofa and drank deeply from his glass.

"And Tian Shan?" asked Wong.

"If you don't mind, I won't go over that again, Wong."

"Rick was in love with her," said Jo Brent suddenly.

Rick Hale sat up. "And we'll skip that."

"Sure, Rick. I meant it to explain to them."

Wong said, "It makes an interesting triangle. I did not realize, while I was following Ogdai down through Sinkiang, that such a curious development was taking place. Could that, you think, have been what Allerdyce foresaw?"

"Allerdyce," said Martin Walsh, "was not a seer." As host, he motioned for the Kashmiri boys to fill the glasses for his guests. They were drinking hard for the kind of men they were—not temperate men, necessarily, but careful men. Martin Walsh ran his fingers up his sallow cheek, as if to feel the beard he'd recently shaved off, after they'd gotten back to Srinagar. "Allerdyce," he said, "simply picked a man who seemed to fit the job. It was that stuff about the Gettysburg Address. That sold him on Rick Hale. A man who had no tools except his memory—and his determination to stay alive—and yet could get out of Tibet was Allerdyce's idea of the man the job required. After that, the best that we could do was to take the usual precautions and pray. Precaution placed me here in India. And then when Wong—what was it that you said?—decided to play ball and radioed which pass Ogdai was approaching, prayer took up. If that snowstorm had come a little earlier and caught us on the crest, the Gurkhas that the British lent me couldn't have got down in time. You were pretty far gone, Rick."

"That was about my own idea of it," Rick said.

"I'm sure," said Gombchiev, "you realize what you have done. Of course the myth of Tian Shan will persist. There will be minor repercussions for a while. But without Ogdai Khan, without his directing brain, there is no harm in it. A myth, a minor Asiatic creed—as Lenin said, an opiate of the people."

"China," said Wong, "puts it another way. A sheathed sword cuts only its scabbard."

Rick Hale got carefully upon his feet. "That's all very nice. Very sweet and philosophical. It's interesting to watch you men at work. But I want out. I got into this simply to get my eagles back—"

Martin Walsh flipped something from his palm. "So there you are. You can take that physical in Washington."

"Physical?" Rick said. "I couldn't pass a group insurance test. I'm a jelly, not a man."

"But a very nice jelly," said Jo Brent.

Rick turned the silver eagles over in his hand. He pinned one of them on his shirt. Non-regulation, maybe, but— "So now," he said, "that's done. The whole kit and kaboodle of you can go straight to hell!"

He turned, stiff-backed, treading hard as he went across the room and out the door and slammed it violently. He strode a dozen yards along the hall, until he heard something tapping very swiftly on the floor. It was Jo Brent, wearing those damned ridiculous high heels. Wearing a frilly sort of thing—

"Wait, Rick!"

"Wait, hell!" he said. "I'm checking out."

"You don't still love her, Rick!"

"Don't I? Did I?"

"Yes, Rick—you loved her. And Tian Shan loved you. I know that, Rick. When I first heard you talking in that desert sandstorm, you being so ferociously gallant over saving me, I knew you loved her. But don't—don't I get something of what's left? Enough, maybe, to try the fairgrounds circuit on?"

His rage, so long bottled in him, died suddenly. His eyes felt blind. He turned to her, seeing behind her tears that jaunty, bantam, redhead look, as if she were prepared to lash at him. Tears now, but in a minute, maybe, no more tears. Something was going from him with his rage. Something, maybe, that had been no more than a dream. A bad dream, maybe. Terrible with violence. Rick was not sure. He knew now only that whatever it had been was gone. And what he wanted now—

"Is that," he asked, "my old Aunt Jo?"

"Yes, Rick."

"Come here."

"I'm coming, Rick."

THE END

DINGO

By JOHN HETHERINGTON

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN McCORMACK

"Down, Michael!" said Sanderson.

THE sensual cry of Karangi, the dingo, sounded far off in the timber. It was clear and mellow, like the single stroke of a fine bell. The dog Michael stirred uneasily, half-raising himself on his front legs, then settling back at a word from the small man on the far side of the fire.

Michael lay on his belly, his head pillowed on his paws, watching the two men. They ate the stew on their tin platters in silence, their faces ruddy in the glow of the fire. One, the small, dry, wrinkled Sanderson, Michael loved with a fierce, protective affection. The other, the rangy, heavy-jowled Rutter, he hated with all the strength of his heart.

The men finished eating and sat smoking their pipes. The moon came up, shedding pallid silver light over the Queensland bush. The

silence seemed only to be deepened by the mutter of the creek. The occasional splutter of the fire, as a pocket of resinous sap in the wood ignited, sounded as loud as a pistol shot in the hush.

Sanderson took his pipe from his lips.

"Another week an' we'll pull up stakes," he said. "We're rich men, Rutter. Rich as prospectors go, anyway."

Rutter grunted. "I won't be sorry to get back to Brisbane. Three more months of this an' I'd go crazy."

He stretched out a hand to the fire. Michael's ears flattened against his skull, his body grew taut, but Rutter only broke off a burning twig to relight his pipe, then settled back into his former position. The dog's muscles slackened.

Of late, Michael watched Rutter constantly. He knew the big man meant evil to him and to Sanderson. More than once he had seen the glance of enmity Rutter shot at Sanderson's turned back. One night, when the two men had sat over the fire measuring the gold they had won from the creek, Michael noticed the cruel, acquisitive expression which puckered Rutter's mouth, the calculating sideways look he cast at Sanderson.

Again, Karangi's call sounded from the timber, and Michael came to his feet, body trembling with a strange and delightful excitement.

"Down, Michael!"

He sank down at Sanderson's command, but his ears remained cocked, listening for a renewal of the call from the timber.

New instincts had been born in Michael in the last few weeks. Before then, Sanderson had filled his life, claimed all his adoration. Now his love for Sanderson was no less, but a previously unguessed factor had entered his being. He had seen Karangi only once. She had crept out of the timber one night and stood, magnificent, alluring, in the moonlight. Michael's heart had expanded with sudden ungovernable passion, and he would have gone to her instantly had Sanderson's voice not checked him like a lash and sent Karangi gliding off into the bush. But the desire to go to her had not lessened in the days and nights that followed. Instead it had grown more acute, more urgent. Now, when he heard her call in the night, he could barely restrain the instinct which impelled him to answer.

For Michael was half dingo. His father was an Alsatian, gone bush; his mother a full-blooded dingo. They had gone off into the timber and stayed together for a full month before the Alsatian had slipped from his mate's side one night and not returned. There was nothing for her to do but rejoin the pack, and in the middle of a hard winter Michael was born.

Ten days after Michael had opened his eyes on the world, his mother fell a victim to the rifle of a drover. It was a bad time of year for an orphan. Game was scarce, the pack constantly on the move. They could not wait for laggards or weaklings; the lives of the whole pack were at stake. So Michael had been left to die. It was the law of the bush—cruel but unalterable.

When his short, weak legs failed him and the pack trotted away into the timber, Michael had howled in a small, tremulous voice, but none of the gliding forms halted to wait for him to catch up. Michael was alone. He had sat down, whimpering with loneliness, aghast with fear of the unknown.

It was two days later that Sanderson had come upon Michael. Sanderson was riding one horse and leading another, and he probably would not have noticed the tiny bundle of misery had not Michael, with the last of his remaining strength, set up a whimper at sight of this strange being. Sanderson's hard, wrinkled face had lighted as his eyes fell on Michael. He dismounted and knelt beside the castaway.

"Hello, young fella," he had said. "You sure look sorry for yourself!"

Michael's wild instincts rose at sight of the enemy, Man, and he had tried to bite the hand Sanderson stretched out to him. His jaws closed on a thick, calloused forefinger, but there was no strength behind them. Sanderson had only laughed delightedly and said, "Savage little devil!"

He had picked Michael up and pushed him under his coat. It was warm in there, and Michael, knowing with sure instinct that this man meant him no harm, had snuggled in against Sanderson's body. He slept, wrapped in the coat, while Sanderson lit a fire. When he awoke Sanderson had fed him with condensed milk thinned out in warm water, tipping the liquid into his mouth from a teaspoon. Michael's little belly lost its feeling of numb emptiness and warmth flooded his body. He licked Sanderson's hand and fell asleep.

After that they had traveled on together. At first Michael was weak and his legs would barely lift him, let alone carry him. But after a week he was able to totter a few steps without stumbling onto his face. And after a month he could walk and run as though he had never been on the brink of death by starvation.

The roaming life Sanderson lived suited Michael's taste. Sanderson was a prospector, constantly on the move, his only roof a canvas tent. Sometimes they would spend a week or ten days by a creek while Sanderson looked for "colors," but more often they were up and away after a day or so, Sanderson mounted and leading his packhorse, Michael jogging along behind or darting off into the timber in pursuit of a rabbit or a wild pigeon.

AT nine months, Michael had developed into a powerful dog, with great muscular shoulders tapering to slim flanks, and green luminous eyes inherited from his dingo mother. His coat was tawny yellow, and already a ruff of darker hair, apt to rise belligerently in moments of danger, was forming around his shoulders.

It was then that Rutter had joined them.

He came to their camp one night near sunset, riding a scraggy roan mare. Both man and horse were unkempt and weary.

"I'm tuckered out," Rutter had explained briefly, in the manner of the bush. "Can I have a feed?"

"Sure," Sanderson had replied. "There's a damper in the ashes, an' I knocked over a 'roo with the rifle this morning."

While the meat was frying Rutter explained that he and a mate had been out prospecting. His mate had gone back for supplies. He had waited, but his mate never returned. He hadn't eaten for forty-eight hours, he said, when he came on Sanderson.

After the meal, Sanderson had given Rutter some tobacco for his pipe, and they sat talking over the campfire. Michael, watching, took a sudden dislike to the man. He did not, as a man might have done, read danger signs in the furtive movement of the hard, light blue eyes, but the instinct that he had inherited from a thousand ancestors told him that Rutter harbored menace for himself and Sanderson.

At last Sanderson rose. "I'm turnin' in," he had said.

"Wait a minute." Rutter stood up. "Listen, how about you an' me teaming up? It ain't good for a man to be alone in these parts."

Sanderson had scratched the side of his chin. "I dunno. I've always worked alone."

"Maybe." Rutter was persuasive. He went on, "Two men can work the creeks better'n one. Here's a sporting offer. I'll take a third of anything we find, the other two-thirds are yours for the tucker. How about it?"

Sanderson had scratched his chin harder, then shrugged and gave in. "All right."

So it was that Rutter had joined them.

From the first, Michael had resented Rutter's presence. It seemed to threaten the bond of intimacy which existed between Sanderson and him.

At breakfast on the first morning, Rutter, with a nod in Michael's direction, had said, "That's an ugly brute you've got there, Sanderson. Where'd you pick him up?"

"He's all right," Sanderson had replied. "I've had him since he was a pup."

Rutter stood up and, moving over to where Michael lay, had stirred him with a toe. Michael's neck tensed and his teeth showed in a white snarl. Rutter stepped back.

"Nasty devil, that!" he had snapped. "He wouldn't be around long for all of me."

"Quiet, Michael!" Michael knew that tone in Sanderson's voice. It had to be obeyed. He covered his teeth and swallowed his snarl, but he still watched Rutter.

"Come away from him, Rutter," Sanderson had said. "He don't like strangers."

Michael tried to smother his dislike of Rutter because he knew that Sanderson wished it. It was not easy. Rutter delighted in tormenting him when Sanderson was not there.

One evening, while Sanderson was washing in the creek, Rutter had approached Michael with a steak of kangaroo meat in his hand. He dangled it a few inches in front of Michael's nose, but when the dog reached up to seize the meat, Rutter had jerked it away, sneering, "You'd like it, wouldn't you, you yellow devil!"

Michael would have sprung on Rutter then, but he saw Sanderson approaching from the creek. Sanderson, returning quietly, had seen the end of the episode, and his voice came incisively across the clearing.

"What's the trouble, Rutter?"

Rutter turned, confused. "I was just going to fry the steak."

"Like hell you were! You were teasing the dog. Give him the steak."

"Damn likely! It's the last of the fresh meat."

"Give it to him, I say."

"Why should I?"

"Because I'm telling you to. Go on!"

"But, damn it, Sanderson, if the dog gets the steak you an' me'll have to eat tinned beef."

"Well, you made him think he was going to get it. Now you'll give it to him."

Rutter had glared at Sanderson for a moment. Then his bluster died before some quality in the smaller man's attitude. He flung the steak on the ground in front of Michael and went off muttering.

After that, Rutter and Sanderson had seemed to return to their former friendliness. But Michael knew that Rutter had not forgiven either him or his master.

Less than a month after the coming of Rutter, they found gold. It had not been the rich lode of every prospector's dreams, but the gold was good and it showed no sign of petering out for a long time. Sanderson had been jubilant in a restrained, cautious way. Rutter, after the first excitement, had had a morose fit and once he'd said to Sanderson, "I was a damn fool to make a deal giving you two-thirds of anything we found."

"Think so?" Sanderson had replied. "You seem to forget you wouldn't be here at all unless I'd staked you for tucker."

That had been seven months before—seven months of hard, unbroken toil for Sanderson and Rutter, for Michael seven months of growing hatred of Rutter. . .

Now Sanderson rose, stretching.

"I think I'll turn in. 'Night, Rutter."

On his way to the tent he bent down and ruffled Michael's ears with a hard, gentle hand.

For some time after Sanderson had turned in, Rutter sat by the fire, legs crossed, arms folded across his body, eyes staring into the red embers. At last, he also rose and, after stamping the fire into blackness, moved across the clearing to the tent.

The dog lay in the shadows. The night was warm, restful, but he had no desire for sleep. He was wakeful; the excitement which had been with him ever since he had heard Karangi call from the timber would not let him rest. A movement on the far edge of the clearing caught Michael's eye. Something was treading softly there, hidden by the shadows. Michael stood up, body quivering, ears cocked.

Karangi slid from the shadows into a patch of moonlight and stood like a figure carved in silver. Michael stepped from the shadows and faced her across the clearing. So they stood for perhaps thirty seconds. Then Karangi turned, her long tail switching, imperious as an empress' fan. The darkness swallowed her.

Michael stood looking after her. It seemed to him that he could still see her there in the moonlight. He whined and ran a few steps across the clearing. There he paused and looked back at the tent where Sanderson lay sleeping. He was torn between two demands of his being—loyalty to Sanderson and obedience to the call of his blood. His body quivered with the effort of deciding. From the timber near at hand came Karangi's cry, sensual, imperative.

Michael stiffened. He threw up his head, and his cry went soaring out to the moon. Then, with leaping heart, he loped across the clearing and disappeared into the timber.

MICHAEL stayed more than three days with Karangi. They spent the days hunting and killing for food, he in the lead, she at his shoulder. At night they lay in sheltered spots, their bodies warm, one against the other. On the third day, consciousness that Sanderson would have missed him troubled Michael. He smothered it as he contemplated Karangi, but that night the sense that he had betrayed his master reasserted itself and would not be stilled.

When dawn broke Michael refused to follow any of their hunting trails. They had wandered far in their three days together, but with the unerring instinct of the wild or half-wild creature, Michael headed in the direction of the camp. Karangi, puzzled, watched him lope off, then set off in pursuit. When she came up with him she tried to divert him, jostling him with her shoulder, then running off at a tangent in the hope that he would follow. But Michael would not be turned aside. So together they ran on through the timber at a steady loping gait which ate up the miles.

It was the middle of the afternoon when they came near the camp. There Karangi halted, refusing to go farther. Instinct told her that danger awaited her where men were camped. Michael rubbed his muscular shoulder against hers in token of farewell, then, turning, resumed his way. Karangi watched him until his tawny body was lost among the timber, then sorrowfully moved off along the back trail.

As Michael drew near the camp he slowed his pace. He was aware that he had disobeyed Sanderson by going off in the night, and he expected to be punished. He approached the clearing cautiously, peering from the underbrush before he stepped from the shelter of the timber. He stood there, conscious of something amiss. The tent was gone and there was no sign of the packhorses, which usually stood, hobbled, at one side.

He advanced into the clearing and looked about him. The cold ashes of a fire, blackened and dead, and a pile of empty food tins were the only signs that men had once been here. Panic touched Michael's heart. He moved about the clearing, sniffing the air. Twice he halted, with a sharp bark, head to one side, thinking this might be some game Sanderson was playing. But only the echoes from the timber answered him.

He trotted down to the creek, hoping to find Sanderson at work in the claim. He stood on the pebbly beach, the water lapping at his feet, watching a dry leaf sail past on the current. But Sanderson was not there. The only familiar object was the bush-made cradle in which Sanderson and Rutter had washed the gold from the sands of the creek bed.

Michael turned away from the water. This was something his canine intelligence could not grasp. He was conscious of nothing but a forlorn sense of desertion. Abruptly, he stopped. His sensitive nostrils twitched. He began to bark, but the joyous sound broke off and changed to a doleful howl. He turned aside and writhed his way into a clump of thick scrub.

He found Sanderson near the center of the clump. Michael saw the small round hole in his master's forehead, but he could not comprehend its significance. He sat by his master's body for a long time. Twilight closed over the bush, and stars began to dot the sky. At last the dog stirred, raised his head and howled. Some profound instinct told him that Sanderson lay so still and silent because of Rutter. And at this realization, Michael's teeth yearned to bury themselves in Rutter's throat.

He made little noise as he wormed his way out of the clump of scrub. He ran to the clear-

ing and cast around for the scent. It was easy enough to find. Then, with his nose to the earth, he set off into the darkness of the timber.

Rutter had two days' start, but he was traveling with three horses and his rate of progress was slow. Michael sighted him about noon the next day, jogging along on the back of Sanderson's horse, the other two horses in the lead. Michael had long since learned the ways of such men as Rutter, and he did not show himself.

THAT night he hid in the trees surrounding the clearing where Rutter made camp. He watched the man light a fire and cook a meal, then roll himself in his blanket by the fire, with his rifle on the ground beside him. When Rutter appeared to be sleeping, Michael crept from his hiding place. He had approached within a dozen paces of the recumbent man when Rutter, warned by a subconscious sense of danger perhaps, sprang fully awake. Reaching for his rifle, he started up, glaring about him. His eyes found Michael standing in the moonlight, and he let out an oath and flung the rifle to his shoulder.

The bullet picked up the dust where Michael had stood, but the big dog was safe. Whirling with the speed of a phantom, he had slipped back into the shelter of the trees.

Rutter threw more wood on the fire, but he did not lie down again. He sat with his blanket wrapped about his shoulders and the rifle resting across his knees.

Michael waited. He was in no hurry. Two or three times Rutter's head fell forward drowsily, but each time he awoke with a start after no more than a few seconds' slumber. Once there was a sound on the side of the clearing opposite to where Michael lay, and Rutter, throwing aside the blanket, raised his rifle and fired three shots into the bush. He waited tensely for the cry of a wounded dog, but only the echo of his rifle, like ironic laughter, came back to him.

At dawn, Rutter, red-eyed, got to his feet and, building up the fire, boiled his billy. Even in daylight his uneasiness lingered. His nerves seemed on the jump. After breakfast, he picked up his rifle and made a round of the clearing, pushing a few yards into the timber here and there, once or twice halting to purse his lips and whistle in the hope of luring the dog into the open. But Michael lay under cover deep among the tall trees where he had retreated at the coming of daylight.

Rutter seemed eager to push on. He lost no time in saddling and loading the horses, and before the sun was far above the level of the trees he had struck camp and moved off into the timber.

All that day, Michael hung at his heels. Once, when he chased and killed a rabbit for food, he lost sight of Rutter, but he soon picked up the trail again. Rutter rested little that day. He drove the horses on even through the hottest part of the day when it is customary for a man and his beast to rest a spell. He looked weary when he made camp that night, moving lethargically as he went about the routine of hobbling and watering the horses and making a fire.

He did not lie down that night, but again sat with his blanket draped over his shoulders, the fire glinting on the barrel of the rifle where it rested across his knees. Michael lay in the shadows, alert, waiting.

The moon rose and moved across the sky. Its light gave an eerie air of menace to the spectacle of the fear-stricken man sitting hunched by the fire. Once Rutter got up and walked up and down for a few minutes. He was fighting his tired brain's demand for sleep. Then he turned to the fire, threw the blanket across his shoulders and huddled himself on the ground once more. Presently his head nodded, his body relaxed. He slipped to one side, sleeping.

Michael waited, with the patience possible only to an animal, for whom time means nothing, who sees only one objective and pursues it with unswerving purpose. Rutter lay unmoving, and at last the dog stood up and stepped, quiet as a beam of shifting moonlight, from the cover of the trees. His pads made no sound on the ground. Keeping in the shadow, he worked his way behind Rutter.

He moved into the moonlight, nose down, ears flat against his skull, and bounded across the few yards separating him from the figure by the fire. A low snarl was rising in his throat as he launched himself at the sleeping man. Rutter woke and groped for his rifle, but his fingers did not find it. He had a momentary vision of eyes like green flames, a stiffened ruff of hair framing white teeth.

His scream died in a choked cry as Michael's fangs sank into his throat.

Michael trotted away from the clearing, leaving a silent, motionless heap lying in the ebbing light of the fire. The dog sniffed the night air, his body thrilling to the consciousness that he had accomplished his purpose. He felt, somehow, that he had atoned for having deserted Sanderson.

He ran on and then, in a patch of moonlight, halted and flung up his head. His cry shattered the silence of the bush, rolled and palpitated through the timbered gullies. He stood, listening.

From far away there came an answering cry, sensual, and clear and mellow like the single stroke of a fine bell.

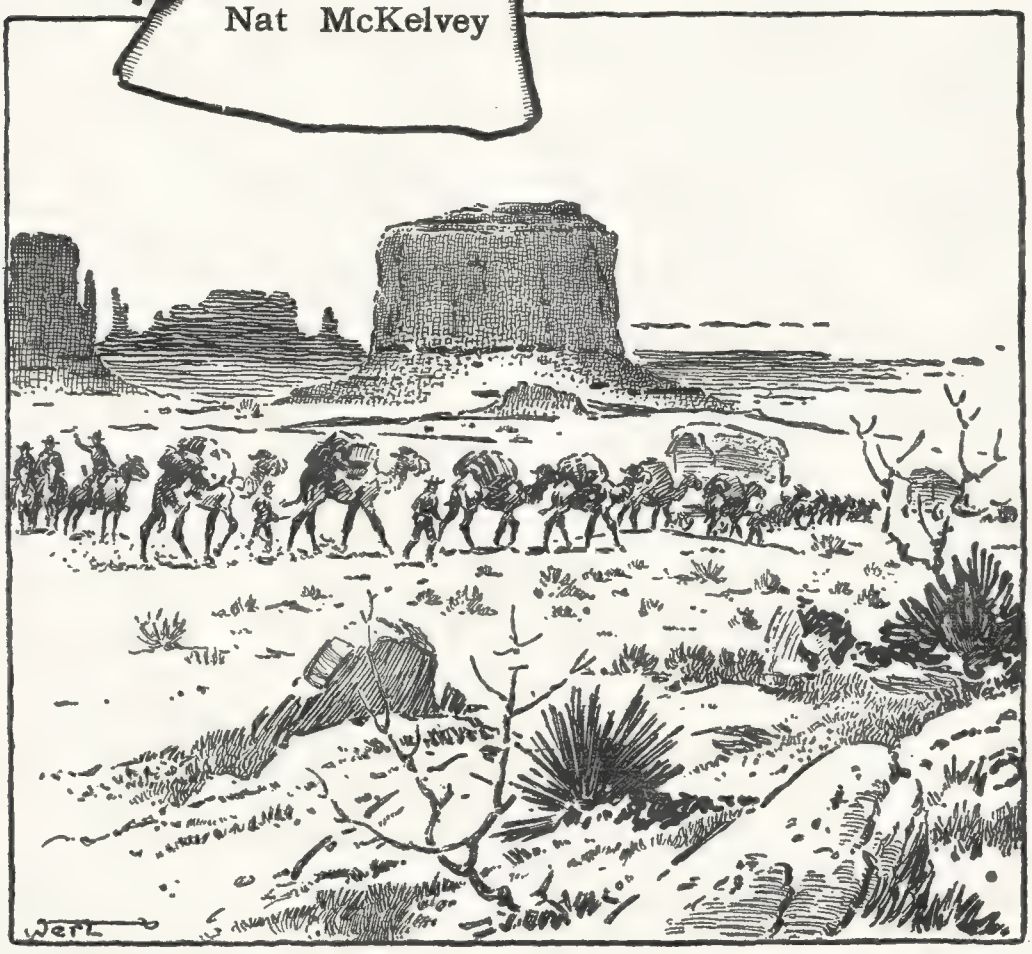
Michael threw up his head and called again, then sprang forward to join Karangi.

THE CAMELS

A Fact Story

By

Nat McKelvey



FORTY thousand camels fought for the United Nations during World War II but not one of them belonged to Uncle Sam.

Were he alive, Jefferson Davis, one time president of the Confederacy, would be deeply concerned, for Jeff Davis was the sponsor of a magnificent camel dream. As Secretary of War under President Franklin Pierce, this former Southern senator envisioned camels with small cannon fixed on their humps, spearheading attacks against the Apache and Comanche savages of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

The Davis vision became reality. But the U.S. Army's one and only camel corps, under impact of the Civil War, died in its infancy, praised by few, damned by many. Nevertheless, tangible evidence of the corps' existence still survives. Though Davis could not foresee it,

AREN'T COMING

The journey spanned four thousand miles of hostile Indian country without loss of man or animal.

the importation into the United States of camels and native drivers gave to the neighboring country of Mexico one of her great presidents, General Plutarco Elias Calles, strong man, politician, soldier.

From an overland survey made with the Davis camels was established a route that is followed today by the Santa Fe Railroad and U.S. Highway 66 across the high plateaus of

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WERT

northern New Mexico. And when John Butterfield, founder of the American Express Company, needed experienced help to establish the famed Butterfield stage route, he turned to Jeff Davis' camels and one of the imported native drivers.

Fighting in North Africa, American troops could easily have used a camel corps. We had none. But our allies had several and used them to good advantage. Almost as old as Arab civilization, the camel corps for many generations has played an important, even a decisive, role in desert warfare. U.S. government agents, buying camels for Jeff Davis, probed into the very heart of the Crimean War, there to see the British camel corps in fierce, important action at Balaklava.

In World War II, the camel corps first came into the news in 1940. Then, German agents were attempting to stir up an Arab revolt, hoping thus further to harass the British. They reckoned without the Bikaner Gonga Risola, famous Indian camel corps. This unit of men and animals accompanied a British striking force into British Somaliland and into Berbera, breaking up all armed resistance. The same group successfully patrolled the high pass from Yemen to Aden, a rugged, rocky-bottomed mountain gorge, devoid of water and inaccessible to other forms of transport.

Made up of desert tribesmen, General de Lay's Fighting French Camel Corps helped General Leclerc's columns to protect the British Eighth Army's flank as it moved northward into Tunisia. Strangely, it was this corps that broke up a German tank attack. And for reconnaisance, the corps proved to have no peer.

In the Iraqui Desert, the British camel corps has been used consistently for carrying rations, gasoline and ammunition to troops who first fought for and now guard the important desert regions.

JEFFERSON DAVIS could say, "I told you so." Yet, he himself had to be sold on the idea of founding an American camel corps. In the United States of pre-Civil War days, camels were strictly a novelty and, therefore, suspect. True, in 1701 a slave trader had brought a small herd to Virginia, but the unsuitable climate proved too much for the desert-bred "oonts." They exercised what Colonel T. E. Lawrence of Arabia swears is the camel's God-given ability: they willed themselves to die. And so did a group brought by the Spaniards to Peru, during the days of the great conquest.

Down in Florida, in 1836, Major George H. Crosman, U.S.A., pondered these facts. He decided that the early failures were the result of attempting to transplant the beasts to areas in which acclimatization was too great an obstacle. He thought of the tremendous, arid regions of our own Southwest. Camels, he concluded, should do well there. He approached Washington, but his plea fell on deaf ears.

Major Crosman then sought the interest of a fellow officer, Major Henry C. Wayne. In 1848, Major Wayne placed the idea before the War Department, also suggesting it to Senator Jefferson Davis. A man of courage and vision, Davis was quick to grasp the possibilities. The Mexican War was successfully concluded and California was ringing to the eager picks of gold seekers. There was no reliable means of transportation to our vast western frontier. Indians were rampant, constantly harassing the pioneers who went forward to unify the West. In 1850, the Southwest required the services of ten thousand mules at a maintenance cost of ten dollars each per month. Soldiers perceived the advantage to be gained by using camels. The animals required little water and could survive for weeks on desert vegetation.

In 1853, Senator Davis laid before President Pierce a plan for obtaining camels and employing them as transport caravans and as military units to fight the Indians. Pierce showed some interest, but the immediate result of Senator Davis' efforts was the founding of a private company, the American Camel Company of New York. For lack of experience and capital this organization failed.

Undaunted, Senator Davis pressed his idea, and support came unexpectedly out of the very West that Davis conceived to be in desperate need of a camel corps. Lieutenant Edward Fitzgerald Beale, later a general and member of the American Diplomatic Corps, was busily engaged in making a survey of murderously hot, arid Death Valley. He decided that camels would be invaluable for such work and presented his recommendation to Davis.

Under the impact of these forceful personalities, who backed their plan with irrefutable logic, Congress was finally persuaded of the desirability of adding a camel unit to the United States Army. On March 3, 1855, President Pierce signed a bill appropriating $30,000 for the purchase of camels.

Commanding the U.S. Navy's ship, *Supply*, Lieutenant David Dixon Porter, who, in later life, wore the gold braid of an admiral, started on one of the most bizarre expeditions in the history of American fighting forces. In the spring of 1855, the *Supply* slipped away from the United States bound for an Italian port, there to rendezvous with Major Wayne.

Major Wayne had already left the United States for England, where he made a thorough study of camels in the London Zoo. From Italy, Lieutenant Porter and Major Wayne made their way to Tunis. Hardly had they completed purchase of their first camel when the Bey of Tunis, deeming it an expedient diplo-

matic gesture toward the great American republic, presented them with the gift of a pair.

From Tunis the adventurers proceeded to Malta, Smyrna, Salonica and Constantinople, always alert not to be cheated by wily natives who had heard of their mission and envisioned a steady outpouring of Uncle Sam's gold. Camels of every description stemmed out of the Arab countries to be placed on the block for Major Wayne's approval. Every sore-humped, mangy beast from Algiers to the Crimea was driven in by natives who hoped to find the major naive and gullible. With what disappointment they must have discovered Major Wayne's nearly expert knowledge of the "oonts." His stay at the London Zoo paid dividends.

It was at the battle of Balaklava that Major Wayne and Lieutenant Porter received their most profound impression of the value of a military camel corps. Seeing the British corps swinging into action with lances lowered, the native drivers emitting blood-curdling whoops as they charged, convinced the American officers that our own Indians would scatter like chaff in the wind before so fierce and unearthly a sight.

If the buying trip was a complete success, the two officers encountered difficulties in their efforts to load their charges aboard the *Supply*. Lieutenant Porter discovered that the deck of his ship was too low to admit the camels below deck without bruising their humps. A camel with a bruised hump is a camel that sulks for days on end, useless and unruly.

While trying to solve this problem, Lieutenant Porter and Major Wayne became painfully aware of the camel's ill-temper, harelip, halitosis and dirty yellow teeth. Watching his sailors attempting to load the beasts, Lieutenant Porter was morbidly fascinated by the camel's mechanism for self-protection. Many a tar was sprayed by foul green cud, kicked and bitten. In this extremity, Lieutenant Porter was forced to raise the deck of his ship. Only then would the camels be led into the hold.

ONE May day in 1856, the sleepy Gulf port of Powder Horn, Texas, was awakened by the shouts of stevedores, mingled with the yelps of camels and the strange-sounding language of native drivers. Lieutenant Porter was landing the first camel contingent, thirty-nine animals for the U.S. Army. Five Oriental drivers, under contract to Uncle Sam, drove the herd overland the brief distance to the inland town of Indianola.

Indianola townsfolk, caught in the circus-like spell of activity attending the arrival of the camels, turned out in droves. Interested in the beasts, the Indianola people were skeptical of their ability to carry great loads.

"Shucks," one old-timer grunted, "them things cain't stand up to a good old Texas mule."

As Major Wayne methodically loaded one of the beasts with four bales, totaling 1,250 pounds, the townsfolk shook their heads sagely. But they were in for a surprise.

"When the camel arose, showing no strain," the major commented, "and walked away quietly with his four bales, as one who felt himself master of the situation, there was a sudden change of public feeling, most flattering to the outlandish brute and encouraging to his military sponsors."

So completely converted were the Indianolans that a frontier bard commemorated the event with a poem, published in the Indianola *Bulletin*. Called, ignorantly, "A Node" (An Ode), the poem lauded the beasts as the salvation of the frontier.

Early successes with camel experiments led the government to send Lieutenant Porter abroad once more. In 1857, he landed a second cargo, forty-one animals, at Powder Horn. These were driven first to Indianola and then to a permanent experiment station, Camp Verde, near San Antonio. The stage was set for Lieutenant Edward Fitzgerald Beale to make his epic cross-country journey from Camp Verde to California and back.

By June of 1857, when Lieutenant Beale began his trip, President Buchanan had come to office, bringing into his cabinet as Secretary of War, John B. Floyd. Floyd was no less enthusiastic than had been Jefferson Davis. New life was breathed into the camel venture.

With nineteen-year-old May Humphreys Stacey, a Pennsylvania, as assistant, Lieutenant Beale left Texas with a caravan of twenty-five animals. Not without difficulty was the journey inaugurated. At the eleventh hour the native drivers struck. They had not been paid, they complained, and without money they would not travel. Finding that the government appropriation for paying these men had been exhausted, Lieutenant Beale was forced to leave them behind. Relying on American drivers, he began the hazardous trip.

Called "a pioneer in the path of empire," Beale was a determined man. As an officer in the United States Navy, he had fought in the Mexican War. He had brought the first gold from California to the bankers of the East and had surveyed Death Valley. From 1852 until 1857 he was Superintendent of Indian Affairs for California and Nevada, successfully working in a country where the tribes accounted a white man's life of less value than a drop of rain. By appointment of the governor of California, Beale became a brigadier general. Later, in recognition of his abilities, President Grant named him Minister to Austria-Hungary.

Beale's particular camel assignment was to

survey a wagon route from Fort Defiance, New Mexico, to the Colorado River. With what mixed emotions he must have "barraked"—halted his caravan for the night—in the shadows of New Mexico's famed Inscription Rock. It was on a Sunday in August, 1857, that Beale and his party bivouacked under El Morro, there to be awed by the names of great and near-great inscribed on the soft, upthrusting sandstone formation. They saw the inscription—dated April 16, 1605—of Don Juan de Oñate, the man who rediscovered the Colorado River and followed it to its mouth at the head of the Gulf of California. They saw the record of Alferes D. Joseph de Payba Basconzelos, representative of the Spanish king, who dated his stay February 18, 1726. They saw, too, the record of Lieutenant Colonel John M. Washington, whose men passed there in 1849 while on an expedition to the Navajo Indians.

It was only natural for Lieutenant Beale to leave his own name on the rock, a nearly indestructible monument to the camel vision of the man who was to become a rebel—Jefferson Davis. It was Beale's survey that established the route followed today by U.S. Highway 66 and the Santa Fe Railroad.

Beale began his return journey from the Pacific Coast on January 6, 1858, leaving California with twenty men and fourteen camels. He left eleven animals at Fort Tejon, California. Near Fort Tejon, in the high mountain ranges, Beale tested his camels by working them in three feet of snow. In one instance, several camels pulled from the snow and ice a wagon that six mules couldn't budge. It was no wonder that Beale frequently remarked, "I would rather undertake the management of twenty camels than of five mules."

Beale's round-trip was completely successful. Lasting one year, the journey spanned four thousand miles of hostile Indian country without loss of man or animal. But, like many another public-spirited man, sacrificing self to the interests of his country, Beale did not complete his journey without hearing accusations of personal malfeasance. Citizens of California charged that he had surveyed the wagon route for the sole purpose of establishing reliable communication between the East and his own ranch near Fort Tejon. The charges were absurd, and Beale ignored them.

UNPLANNED, perhaps the most profound result of the Davis camel venture was the birth, in an obscure village of northern Mexico, of a child who was to have a significant future in the republic south of the Rio Grande. Of the five native drivers brought to the United States to manage camels, a Syrian, who assumed the name of Elias, was destined to influence history.

Elias, following the dismemberment of the camel corps, drifted to Sonora, Mexico. There, historians tell us, he married a Yaqui Indian girl without benefit of clergy. "Of this union," a modern writer reveals, "were born several children. Among them was a boy who later became Mexico's president and strong man—Plutarco Elias Calles."

There were other drivers, too, who left their mark on the pages of Western history. Variously called Arabian, Syrian and Greek, Hadji Ali won the immediate liking of his American contemporaries. Although he was carried on the payroll under the name of "Philip Tedro," he was best known as "Hi Jolly," a name fastened on him by American soldiers and muleskinners. Short, fat and good-humored, he lived up to his nickname.

Like the other native drivers, he contracted to serve the government for two years at fifty dollars a month, plus room and board. He fulfilled his contract and then remained in the United States for fifty years, during which time he was a familiar figure prospecting in the Plomas and Harqua Hala Mountains of western Arizona. He was connected with such fabulous lost mines as the Nigger Ben and the Peg Leg. He was a frequent drinking partner of the gargantuan discoverer of the Peg Leg mine, Peg Leg Smith, whose wooden leg contained a compartment for an ever-ready bottle of "thunder and lightning, brewed to a fine pizen."

As a boy, Hi Jolly had served in the French army at Algiers. There he had learned to muster a consuming hatred for Germans. During the waning nineteenth century, Hi Jolly, riding a bright yellow chariot drawn by two huge bull camels, bore down on a German Club picnic in progress near Los Angeles. Seeing this apparition, the Huns, who had just sung *Die Wacht Am Rhein*—the Horst Wessel song had yet to be invented—decamped as one man, dinnerless. For weeks afterward, the hills 'round about were strewn with bottled beer, wienerwurst, and fragments of halters and disabled vehicles.

But there came an end to Hi Jolly's German-hating days. At a venerable age, death overtook him at the nondescript village of Tyson's Wells, Arizona, on Beale's old road from the Colorado River to Wickenburg. Before gas rationing, motorists used to stop to read the roadside monument placed in honor of the fat little camel driver from the Middle East.

Most popular of Lieutenant Beale's assistants, though no monument has been raised to his memory, was Greek George, naturalized in this country as "George Allen." Greek George helped John Butterfield lay out, by means of a camel survey, the famous Butterfield stage route, wandering across Texas, New Mexico and Arizona to the Pacific Coast.

George was an almost mythical character. Modest, sturdy, well behaved, he engaged in many a campaign against the Indians. He had a tremendous beard and thatch of hair so thick as to be almost bullet-proof. During a fight near Camy Mohave, an Indian arrow struck George squarely in the jaw. He got only a scratch. The beard had turned the flint-tipped arrow!

In the matter of Greek George's death, the reader has a choice. One account says that he settled near Los Angeles where, in 1874, he was shot to death by law officers trying to route out Vasquez, the Mexican bandit, who had taken refuge in George's house. Another story says that George killed a man in New Mexico, then committed suicide to escape capture. More probably George died quietly in bed, as one historian declares, at Whittier, California.

What became of Uncle Sam's camels who left their historic footprints in the sands of the American Southwest? After a most auspicious start and four years of active life, the corps fell apart, a casualty of the Civil War.

There were many things in favor of the corps' continuance. Experiments showed that six camels could do the work of twelve horses in much less time. They had proven themselves excellent on trails where wagons couldn't go. Experience with the "oonts" in World War II proves what Lieutenant Beale discovered long ago. With a five-hundred-pound load, the beasts can travel twenty-five miles a day. Hitched to a wagon, they can pull 1,600 pounds.

The French Imperial Zoological Society was so sincerely convinced of the success of the American camel corps that, in 1858, it awarded a gold medal to Major Wayne for "the successful introduction and acclimation of the camel in the United States." And, also in 1858, Secretary of War Floyd, declaring the venture a complete success, suggested that Congress authorize the purchase of one thousand additional camels. Congress declined. In 1859 and 1860, Floyd tried again. Congress held out, and the Civil War closed the files permanently.

It was, however, not only the Civil War plus a disinterested Congress that doomed the Davis experiment. Used to mules, soldiers assigned to work with the ships of the desert couldn't adjust themselves. They found that the odor of camels stampeded horses and mules, and the camels themselves frequently went A.W.O.L. Cussing them, unlike the reaction with mules, produced no results. Mule-skinners hated the "oont" with a virulent, flaming passion.

IN ROCKY desert places, especially in Arizona and parts of California, the camels' feet became badly cut, laming the animals beyond use as cargo carriers. However, at least one objection to the camels—the necessity for shearing them because of the heat—produced definite, historic results.

When the first contingent was landed in Texas, every beast was sheared to make it comfortable and more tractable. From this wool, Mrs. Mary A. Shirkey, of Victoria, Texas, knitted a pair of camel hair socks, which were duly presented, through the offices of Major Wayne and Secretary of War Davis, to President Pierce. He became the first—and probably the only—chief executive to own a pair of camel hair socks, made from the hair of camels belonging to Uncle Sam.

When North and South flung themselves at each others' throats, the Federal government loosed most of its camels. Some were bought at auction by Beale, by then a general. With his son, Truxtun, he became a familiar sight on the streets of Los Angeles, driving a carriage pulled by a team of dromedaries. Angelenos were frequently startled to hear the general addressing his beasts in Syrian.

Straying camels, part of the government herd, became such a menace in some sections of the United States that local lawmakers found

Yaqui and Apache Indians hunted the animals for meat.

it necessary to pass ordinances against persons permitting camels to roam unattended. Such was the condition in Brownsville, Texas, in 1860. In 1875, Nevada passed a law—not repealed until 1899—making it illegal to permit camels to wander unshepherded throughout the state. Violators were fined from $25 to $100 and/or ten to thirty days in jail.

A few of Jeff Davis' camels strayed to Arkansas where enterprising Union soldiers corraled and sold them in 1863 in an Iowa auction. In the West, Yaqui and Apache Indians hunted the animals for meat.

But if the Indians could eat camel meat, there were white folks who could not. In 1891, a large bull camel stampeded horses and cows near the town of Harrisburg, Arizona. Harry Wharton, one of the original camel drivers under Beale, lassoed the brute, rode it out of the cattle corral and shot it. Two Mexicans, finding the carcass, stripped it, under cover of night, and sold the meat to an unsuspecting Harrisburg butcher. Every resident of Harrisburg became violently ill. Not the least among them was Bill Baer, who was, ironically, a mule-skinner!

From Texas to California old desert-rat prospectors, not always in their cups, reported seeing wild camels. The most recent report was *circa* 1913. Legends sprang up by the thousands. In the Big Bend country of Texas, it was the mysterious white ghost camels that were said to whisk persons away to a terrible oblivion.

While Texans were busy trying to outwit these phantoms, folks in western Arizona were harassed by a bull camel, called by the Mexicans, "La Phantasma," and by the Americans, the "Red Ghost." When this apparition finally was shot, human remains were found bound to its back by rawhide thongs. The bones were thought to be those of Jesus Villegos, a Mexican bandit, whom the Apaches tortured.

Probably the last authentic record of a Jeff Davis camel was established in 1901. In that year, a Southern Pacific train ran over and killed a camel in the Colorado Desert.

Most famous single aftermath of the U.S. Camel Corps occurred in 1875, when "Uncle" Dan Noonan, of Gila Bend, Arizona, participated in the strangest round-up west of the Pecos.

Uncle Dan, it seems, following the sale of a large cattle herd, was enroute from Temple to Gila Bend. While descending the slopes of the Estrella Mountains, he saw strange tracks. Following them, he came to the big bend of the Gila River. There, on the branches of the numerous mesquite trees, hung weird, fantastic saddles and packs.

Uncle Dan didn't think long about the incident. But one day a Mr. Smith, representing Sells Brothers Circus, rapped on his door.

"I've a job for you," Smith said.

With a small band of Papago Indian braves, Uncle Dan trekked away to the Harqua Hala Plains. In a few days he returned, driving ahead of him a band of twenty-five camels! For these, the circus paid twenty-five dollars a head. Arizona witnessed its strangest round-up, and the bewildered "oonts" were soon in the unfamiliar surroundings of Kansas City.

TO BE sure, the camel saga is not without modern repercussions. In 1930, a famous national news weekly reported that descendants of a Colonel Bethel Coopwood, of San Antonio, were bringing suit against the U.S. government. Said the magazine:

> Last week Col. Coopwood's descendants told the following story: Col. Coopwood bought all the available dromedaries at $31 per head, took them to join his original herd of fourteen in Mexico. But when he drove the entire herd back into Texas, they were seized by the United States as stolen goods. Col. Coopwood filed a claim against the government, vainly pressed it during his lifetime. Last week's news was revival of the claim by Coopwood descendants.

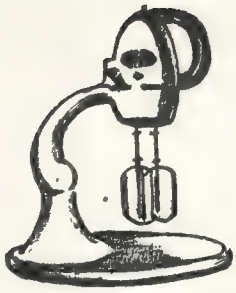
Now, undeniably, the colonel was a salty jigger. On at least one documented occasion, he was hailed into a Texas court on a charge of carrying concealed weapons. He may have been capable of carelessly appropriating a few of Uncle Sam's "oonts." But the U.S. Court of Claims fails to verify this.

You may take your Coopwood or leave it alone. You cannot deny, however, that the camel corps of Jefferson Davis was the inspiration guiding recent activities of the Los Angeles Philatelic Club. Commemorating National Philatelic Week, this group of stamp fans inaugurated a one-day mail-carrying camel caravan from Los Angeles to Fort Tejon, near Beale's ranch in the Tehachapi Mountains. Collectors prize this mail.

Had the Davis camel venture survived, it is hardly likely that we would today have regularly-established caravan routes. Nevertheless, the U.S. Army could have used a camel corps in the desert fighting in North Africa.

Jefferson Davis guessed the value of the camel in desert warfare. From observation of Allied units, our soldiers knew first hand the merits of the "oont." In a North African engagement, one camel absorbed twenty-three machine-gun slugs. He didn't even stagger. A vet plugged the holes with cotton, and the "oont" went about his business of beating Germans.

There are those who will scoff, but some military opinion holds that the United States ought to have increased the number of camels fighting for the Allied cause by the addition of a genuine GI American camel corps.



SNAFU ON BOGG ISLAND

By GEORGE C. THOMPSON

ILLUSTRATED BY J. CAMPBELL FARREN

We have stacked all *the crates on the island and are now living forty feet from the ground.*

SUBJECT: Disposition of Excess Egg Beaters

BOGG ISLAND
CAROLINES
29 MAY 1945

TO: COMMANDING GENERAL,
Office Quartermaster General
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

I know you will forgive my disregarding channels in writing directly to you when you understand what a desperate position I am in.

Yesterday we received a whole big boatload of "Handy-Mix Automatic Egg Beaters." Now that

might not be so bad in some places but I am almost frantic trying to figure out what to do with them.

You see, there are only three of us stationed on this island and it is about as big as your fist. Well, the fact of the matter is, there just isn't enough room to accommodate both the egg beaters and us.

Please, sir, write immediately telling me what steps to take to dispose of same.

LEON SCHUSTER
Corporal, USA

OFFICE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

10 June 1945

TO: Corporal Leon Schuster
Bogg Island, Carolines

Reference to above we feel there must be a mistake somewhere as our records show no shipment of "Handy-Mix Automatic Egg Beaters" to Bogg Island.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:
RUFUS MOORE
Col., QMC,
USA

SUBJECT: Disposition of Excess Egg Beaters

BOGG ISLAND
CAROLINES
24 JUNE 1945

TO: COLONEL RUFUS MOORE
Office Quartermaster General
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

I note you are handling this matter rather than the Commanding General which is just as well because he probably would not have the time to deal properly with my serious predicament on this island.

However, you state in your letter of 10 June 1945; ". . . we feel there must be a mistake somewhere as our records show no shipment of 'Handy-Mix Automatic Egg Beaters' to Bogg Island."

There sure is a mistake somewhere because our island is covered with egg beaters. In fact we are sleeping on top of the crates and some of them are even crowded into the sea.

Please, sir, write immediately telling me how to dispose of above.

LEON SCHUSTER
Corporal, USA

OFFICE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

1 July 1945

SUBJECT: Care of Egg Beaters

TO: Corporal Leon Schuster
Bogg Island, Carolines

I am in receipt of your letter of 24 June 1945, and note some of the egg beaters you ordered are crowded into the sea.

I suggest you and your men recover them from the ocean and put them where they will be high and dry.

You had better open at least five of the crates which were in the water to see if the egg beaters have been damaged in any way and forward a report immediately to this office.

Be sure in resealing the crates that you make them moisture and fungus proof.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:
JOHN W. MILLS
Lt. Col., QMC,
USA

SUBJECT: Disposition of Excess Egg Beaters

BOGG ISLAND
CAROLINES
13 JULY 1945

TO: LT. COL. JOHN W. MILLS
Office Quartermaster General
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

I notice you, instead of Col. Rufus Moore, are handling this now and it is just as well because I could get no satisfaction from him although he probably meant well.

Finally, we have stacked *all* the egg beaters on the island and are now living forty feet from the ground. We inspected each crate that had been in the water because the second one we opened was all rusty. Altogether we found eight hundred and forty-one egg beaters damaged in one manner or another, but this figure is infinitesimal when compared to the tremendous number of same on our island. However, it seems to me we are overlooking the main point which is getting rid of all these egg beaters and once more getting our feet back on the ground.

Please, sir, write soon giving steps to take for disposal of above.

LEON SCHUSTER
Corporal, USA

OFFICE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

28 July 1945

SUBJECT: Care of Egg Beaters

TO: Corporal Leon Schuster
Bogg Island, Carolines

I am having shipped to you without delay ten tarpaulins, 40 x 50 feet, which should be large enough to cover your consignment of egg beaters and keep the rain from them.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:
WILLIAM T. BACH
Major, QMC,
USA

SUBJECT: Disposition of Excess Egg Beaters

BOGG ISLAND
CAROLINES
10 AUGUST 1945

TO: MAJOR WILLIAM T. BACH
Office Quartermaster General
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

If you will forgive me, I am tired of being tossed about by official Washington while nothing is being done to rectify what is wrong. My two men are beginning to complain bitterly about having to live so high in the air and I don't blame them, even though I have to maintain order.

You people in Washington seem to be missing the main object in this maze of correspondence. What I want to know is how to get rid of these egg beaters—not how to care for them, sir.

LEON SCHUSTER
Corporal, USA

OFFICE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

23 August 1945

SUBJECT: Egg Beaters

TO: Corporal Leon Schuster
Bogg Island, Carolines

I see by your correspondence that you are in control of an island covered with "Handy-Mix Automatic Egg Beaters". Personally, I am at a loss to see how you could ever use such a great quantity of them.

A previously undisclosed fact has also been dug up and brought to my attention. It is your requisition for a "boatload of Dubbin" which is marked filled.

I can't possibly see what you are doing with a boatload of Dubbin and a boatload of egg beaters on a tiny island like Bogg. Enclosed you will find a statement of charges for eight hundred and forty-one egg beaters which were damaged through your neglect.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:
EMANUAL W. WALTERS
Capt., QMC,
USA

SUBJECT: Disposition of Excess Egg Beaters

BOGG ISLAND
CAROLINES
2 SEPTEMBER 1945

TO: CAPT. EMANUAL W. WALTERS
Office Quartermaster General
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

This is getting entirely beyond my control.

As for the statement of charges, I don't feel responsible, as many of the crates were dumped off the boat into the water and left to float ashore. It was only through a great effort on the part of myself and my two men that we resurrected every single box from the sea.

I beg you to forget this bantering because it is not helping me get rid of these egg beaters.

Another thing, I never ordered a "boatload of Dubbin". What I did order was a "boot load of Dubbin" on 2 May 1945, four months ago and that was for the rainy season which is now well under way. In spite of the requisition being marked filled, I have never received so much as one can of Dubbin and it is now almost too late. However, if you could somehow ship a boot full of Dubbin right away without the usual red tape I guess we could still use it. That is, providing we ever get rid of these egg beaters and get back on the ground.

Please write giving me authority to dispose of above—immediately, sir.

LEON SCHUSTER
Corporal, USA

OFFICE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

12 September 1945

SUBJECT: Letter 2 September 1945, Corporal Schuster

TO: Corporal Leon Schuster
Bogg Island, Carolines

I see by your growing correspondence file you need a boot full of Dubbin. It has already been sent and I believe it will reach you before the rainy season is over in your part of the world.

I also notice you have a considerable supply of egg beaters which you are anxious to dispose of. Whereas I can't see for the life of me why you ever ordered so many, I'll do my best to clear this matter up in the near future.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:
RICHARD R. C. JONES
Lt., QMC.,
USA

SUBJECT: Disposition of Excess Egg Beaters

BOGG ISLAND
CAROLINES
25 SEPTEMBER 1945

TO: LT. RICHARD R. C. JONES
Office Quartermaster General
Quartermaster Supply Branch
Washington, 25, D. C.

At last, I think we are getting somewhere. Anyway, someone has finally recognized the obvious fact that I want to get rid of an entire boatload of egg beaters. I will generously overlook all

the misunderstandings about this situation to achieve the main purpose of getting rid of them. My two men have even offered to go in with me if absolutely necessary on the statement of charges, provided we get speedy action. It can't be so speedy no matter how you look at it when you consider this started way back on 29 May 1945. If we can just clean this up we will be satisfied.

By the way, the tarpaulins arrived this morning and with a prodigious amount of work we have just now finished covering all the crates.

Hopefully,
LEON SCHUSTER
Corporal, USA

Dear Corporal Schuster: October 3rd, 1945

This letter is not official, but as I am one of the hundreds of file clerks employed in the QM General's Office, I have followed your correspondence and believe I can shed light on an otherwise hopelessly confused issue. You really are fouled up. It is difficult to believe things could become so complicated with such a simple beginning. I have investigated enough on my own hook to be able to tell you the surprising truths of your situation. You started the ball rolling yourself, when you made the mistake of ordering a "boot load of Dubbin".

Now in Quartermaster you don't order stuff in just any old sloppy way that comes to mind. You should have consulted your QM Expendable SOP where you would have found Dubbin listed in its correct class with stock number, nomenclature, unit and authorized allowance.

The second big cause of all your troubles was the inefficiency of some minor clerk somewhere who not only let your requisition go through reading a "boot load of Dubbin" but also made a mistake in typing that resulted in its actually reading "a boatload of Dubbin".

Naturally, this unusual amount of Dubbin required going through channels until it eventually reached the manufacturer, Apex Products Company, Chicago, Illinois, who at that time were busily reconverting to their civilian product—"Handy-Mix Automatic Egg Beaters."

In a bewildering series of blunders between the Army and Apex and Apex and the Army, your order went through as a request for their product which was by then egg beaters.

So you can see what happened.

Sincerely,
Robert Irving (Pfc)

BOGG ISLAND
CAROLINES
October 12, 1945

My Dear Robert:

I can see what happened all right and I am sick and tired of seeing it.

Please, for God's sake, find out for me how to dispose of all these egg beaters before my two men and I go completely insane.

Sincerely yours,
Leon

October 22nd, 1945

Dear Leon:

It looks as though this whole thing has gained importance 'way beyond its proportions. The solution is simple and easily carried out, if you ask me.

All you have to do is post a big sign "PRIVATE—GOVERNMENT PROPERTY" and move to an adjoining island. If I am not mistaken there are bound to be thousands of islands thereabouts and one of them must be within a few hundred yards of your present position.

Hoping I have helped you,

Robert

MUMP ISLAND
CAROLINES
November 1, 1945

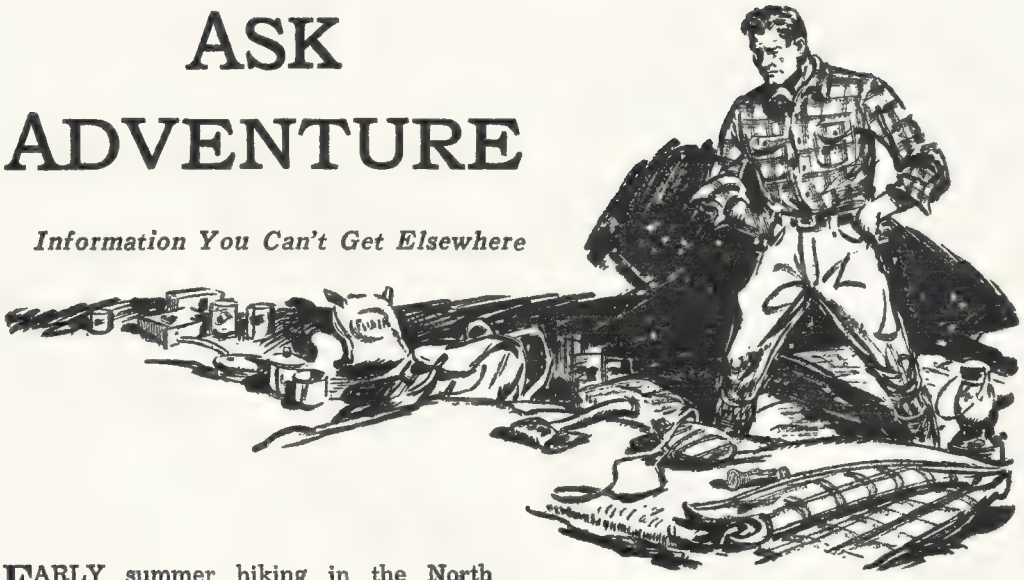
Dear Bob:

Regarding yours of Oct. 22, have complied.

Thanks,
Leon

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere



EARLY summer hiking in the North woods.

Query:—My wife and I are planning a hiking trip throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota and perhaps part of Michigan, starting early in June. Although we are rather used to walking . . . we have done between 30 and 40 miles in a long day on hard roads . . . this time we would like to strike off into the woods, and sleep out.

Would two good blankets with two ponchos be enough covering for that region at that time of year?

Is it worth the money and the work to pack an air mattress? Or is a hollow for the hip-bone comfortable enough?

If no well, spring or pump is available, do you think surface water safe in that country, or should one boil it and make tea?

Any other "tip" that may suggest itself to you would be most thankfully received.

—J. G. K.
Johnstown, Penna.

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—Some time ago I reached the conclusion that blankets were not the most desirable bedding for back-packing or general outdoor sleeping, and switched over to the sleeping bag plan. I've never regretted the change. Of the same weight, a blanket is not as warm as a bag, and worse than that, it has a tendency to come unwrapped as one sleeps, and expose one's feet or whole frame to the chilly night breezes.

Several years ago I made a wool-filled bag that has afforded protection from any but most unusual summer temperatures here in the higher Southern mountains, and I believe it would be warm enough for summer use in the states you mention. Between two pieces of balloon silk (any other light, strong, close-woven cotton fabric will do) I quilted two 1½ pound lambswool bats. (Sears-Roebuck or Montgomery Ward. Get plain bats, not cheese-cloth covered ones.) This quilt was then folded over the long way (made 6½x6 feet) and sewn together across the end and halfway up the side, where a zipper was put in to complete the rest of the side. The result was a bag 6½x3 feet, weighing around 4½ pounds. A little can be saved on weight by narrowing in the foot and for about one third of the length.

Don't have a waterproof cover, for this tends to condense the moisture respired by the body while sleeping, and will become clammy and cold. Protect yourself from rain by a small tent, and from ground moisture by a waterproof ground sheet.

A sleeping bag, down filled, will protect one down to freezing or a little below. I've used one with great satisfaction in the cooler months, though it is a little too warm above 50 degrees. You know, down, weight for weight, is the most efficient filler for sleeping bags, and a heavy downfilled bag will let you sleep warm even in Arctic temperatures. Our grandfathers—or grandmothers—evidently knew what they were about when they made feather beds.

I used to think I was a hard guy. I'd sleep (?) on the bare ground, sand banks, rock piles or board floors. Made no difference to me—I could (and did) take it. But passing years, experience or something has taught me the error of all that, and now, whenever the weight doesn't run my pack up too high, the air mattress or "blow-bed" goes along. It not only cushions the hard ground, but the air insulates your body from the chill of the earth. Don't blow it up too hard, only enough so that when you stretch out, not simply sit, on it, your hips and shoulders don't come in contact with the ground below.

Blowbeds are made in two sizes, full or three-quarter length. Full is a little the more comfortable, but weighs 6½ pounds against four for the smaller bed, so the latter is best for back-packing trips, where every ounce has to be calculated upon.

Scooping out hollows in the earth to accommodate the hips and shoulders and so that the spine between is supported by the earth, helps considerably when one is compelled to sleep on the bare ground, but even then Mother Earth is far from being as comfortable as a mattress. If you travel where cutting browse is permitted, lay down a bed ten or more inches thick of balsam or hemlock tips. Remove all branches bigger than a pencil.

Surface water is dangerous anywhere save in the most remote regions, and then safe only when you are above all human habitation, and there is little travel up stream from you. Boiling all drinking water is a safe precaution, or you can use Halazone tablets. Dropping a tiny tablet in a bucket of water produces the same effect as the chlorinating process used in the city water systems. Before starting, it would be wise for both of you to take typhoid shots. See your physician about this. Halazone tablets are sold by many drug stores.

I'd suggest that you look into the question of dehydrated foods, for these are a godsend to the back-packer. Powdered soups and such vegetables as onions, potatoes and mixed soup vegetables are especially valuable, as are egg powder and Klim, a powdered milk. All these foods are very palatable, and as the processing has removed only the water, they weigh only a bare fraction of the fresh article.

Thirty to forty miles per day is a corking good trek. Even though you are capable of it, don't try to keep up that pace in the woods. Loaf along. Take things easy, and get a full portion of whatever Nature has spread out for you to enjoy.

HE FLIES through the air with the greatest of ease—and the broad-jumper does it without a trapeze!

Query:—I have run in a number of track meets here, and so far have been able to hold my own in the running events. I am 24, 5′ 8½″, 160 lbs., and can run the 100 in ten flat. But my broad-jumping is bad. I have never had any coaching or training, so I don't know anything about steps or timing, or how far to get back from the board. I'd appreciate any information you can give me about broad-jumping. I am getting about 19½ feet per jump now.

—L. T. C.
Jackson, Mich.

Reply by Jackson Scholz:—The chief assets for a broad jumper are speed and leg-spring. Practice sprinting, also jumping as high as possible into the air from the leg you normally use in your take-off.

As to the broad jump itself, the approach to the take-off board is vitally essential, because you must hit the take-off board with your jumping foot while still at top speed, and without being forced to change your stride in the last few steps. In order to do this I would suggest two "checking points," the first one fourteen strides from the board and the second one eight strides from the board. This will make it necessary for you to start your run about 125 feet back. Place a marker at each checking point, and practice until you can bring the proper foot consistently opposite each marker as you pass.

You should be well in your stride by the time you reach the first marker, and should have attained your full speed by the time you reach the second. Don't try to run full speed until you hit the board. Let your momentum carry you for the last three strides. This will give you the chance to gather yourself for the jump itself.

Hit the board hard with your jumping foot, your knee slightly bent. Kick up and forward with your other leg, and throw your arms up and forward. Go up for as much altitude as you can get immediately after you leave the board. That's important! You are now in a sitting position in the air, your body forward, your knees up near your chin. Hold this position till the last instant, before it's necessary to thrust your legs down and forward into the pit. If your body is too far back you are liable to fall back from the point where your feet land. Practice will be necessary to correct this. Some coaches teach their men to throw their body sideways when they land, as a means to keep from touching the ground behind the landing point.

Many jumpers use the "hitch-kick," which, when mastered, will add several inches to the jump. It is nothing more than a quick running motion of the legs while in the air, a technique which isn't much good for a man who can't gain considerable early altitude when he leaves the take-off board.

It usually requires a good deal of practice for a jumper to get his stride so regulated that he can hit the board dead center each time. However, it is not wise to do too much practice jumping for distance, because a man's leg takes considerable punishment each time he hits the board. It is better to make most practice jumps from the ground itself. You won't get much distance, of course, but it will teach you to reach for altitude, and will condition your muscles as well as competitive jumping. While you are training to regulate your stride, it is not necessary, of course, to jump—merely to cross the board as if you intended to jump.

If you have trouble getting height when you leave the board, you may possibly solve the problem by having a couple of friends hold a string near the front edge of the pit about three feet off the ground. If you can jump over the string, and still retain your forward momentum, you're bound to get more distance.

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

✱*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are still engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which were set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work was to be of secondary importance to their official duties. This was as it should be, and when you didn't receive answers to queries as promptly as we all wished, your patience was appreciated. Foreign mails are still slow and uncertain, many are still curtained drastically, but now that the war is over we can hope for a more expanded, smoother functioning *Ask Adventure* service very soon. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society. Broadway at 156th N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, 3225 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 8, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure.*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESEBERG, care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police: *Its history, duties and tradition*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGES SURDEZ, care of *Adventure.*

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACGREAGH, care of *Adventure.* **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits, Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1—*Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure.*

★West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, care of *Adventure.*

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, care of *Adventure.*

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping* — A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Onto., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure.* **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 720 W. New York Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, Holbrook Tribune-News, Holbrook, Arizona. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis. Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.* **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 6)

coast cities of Wexford, Waterford and Dublin, remember that the Norman knights, though addicted, as one chronicler regretfully states, to women and likker in their off moments, were well armed, mounted and trained from childhood to the disciplined use of arms. The Welsh archers were unsurpassed for skill—they were the forerunners of the long-bow boys of Crécy and Poitiers. The Irish tribesmen, on the other hand, considered it undignified to wear armor, attacked as the spirit moved them, and even the supreme efforts of the good bishop O'Toole could not make them unite to squash the invader. And, of course, they were not being pursued by the sheriff at the time, which makes a whale of a lot of difference, as any hardy pioneer would tell you.

Of those who chronicled the invasion, my favorite is Gerald de Barri, one of the FitzGerald family, who was something of an intellectual for his day. He tells a pretty straight story, except that he makes up long sonorous speeches which he *says* the leaders gave out at times of crisis—probably the real thing was something short and unecclesiastical. He also was an easy mark for tall stories, all of which he solemnly wrote down in his little book. He regarded the Irish as a race of horrid savages, but he had to break down and admit that they could sing—and operate a battle-axe.

I have stuck to de Barri—his *Expugnatio Hibernis*—pretty faithfully. However, I don't know whether Richard the Lion-Hearted accompanied his old man to Ireland—he was about twelve at the time—but he well might have, so I stuck him in in the last chapter. But the incident of Dermot MacMurrough's biting off the nose of his late enemy is supposed to be true—at least a number of narrators mention it.

FOUR recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month—a trio of tale-spinners and an article writer. We'll let Mr. McKelvey of the U.S. Camel Corps have the floor first. He writes—

In 1935 they booted me out of the University of Arizona with a Phi Beta Kappa key and the general impression that the world was my oyster. I soon learned that the gold key, to mix a metaphor, was a symbol of "sounding brass." In the West, the depression was hip high and newspaper editors were definitely not looking for bright young college boys. So, I enlisted in the CCC. Some day, I'm going to write an article about the colorful characters who inhabited that outpost of Uncle Sam's generosity.

Before entering college I had cubbed around as a reporter on both Tucson papers, doing sports and school stuff. After college, I went from CCC to private tutoring to hotel cafe management, to slaving on the great All American Canal in the California desert. There followed a job as secretary of a nearly defunct finance company. Then the State Department got me.

With a shiny new passport and high hopes, I jogged off to Tampico, Mexico, there to become a political and commercial reporter and general flunky in the American Consulate. I liked Mexico, but it didn't like me. After airplane jaunts to the capital, to Guatemala City and sundry other junkets, including nurse-maiding Consul L. S. Armstrong's young son through some rough-weather trips to El Mante, in the sugar country, old man malaria, *paludismo* as the natives call it, pinned me to the mat.

Physically, I went from bad to worse and then to the good old U.S.A. Invalided out of the Foreign Service, when the draft came along, I was bounced into 4-F, languishing there to this day. Now, draft regulations say, I'm too old. At 32, I am tottering—they tell me.

Married in '42 and live in Tucson where I've been writing ever since. To date, my work, mostly articles and features, but some fiction, has appeared in *This Week, Saturday Evening Post, Argosy, Coronet,* etc., and now—*Adventure.*

A faded newspaper clipping handed me by my alert mother started me on the camel quest. Nowhere, I discovered, has the entire story been told. My search led through magazines, pamphlets, books, government documents and old newspapers. In talking to old timers hereabouts, I found that nearly everyone has heard about the corps but nobody knows anything about it.

The clipping, telling of the suit of Col. Coopwood and descendants against the U.S. government, sent me scurrying to the university law library. For half a day the librarian and I beat our brains out, trying to find this case in the dusty tomes. We couldn't, for, as explained in the article, it just wasn't there. History cannot honestly record Col. Coopwood as North America's first and only camel rustler.

After a rugged few weeks of research, including a look into the sex life of the camel, an unusual phenomenon about which many amusing stories have been told—some printable—I finally subsided to write my deathless essay. My greatest difficulty was with well-meaning friends, dropping in casually.

"You look tired," they'd say. "Have a camel?"

Personally, I don't smoke.

DOUGLAS H. FOX, who gives us "Dames Dress Different" on page 58, introduces himself briefly thuswise on joining us at the *Fire* for the first time—

Copy-boy in newspaper office, worked on dailies, weeklies. Had long succession of jobs, ranging from bell-hopping to acrobatic dancing with Fanchon-Marco circuit (on one occasion sprinkled pit-orchestra with footlight glass, stopping show in original manner). Amateur boxing and allied sports. Twenty-seven months with "renowned"

42d Rainbow Infantry Division, world War II. Attained rank of PFC. Ten months overseas as combat litter bearer. Bad show in Hardt Mountains, France. Worked hard and constantly, following VE-Day, wangling passes to visit historic and scenic spots in France, Germany, Bavaria, Austria and Italy. Did O.K., on these. Roughest chore of Army life: taking and liking orders from 22-26 year-old first and second lieutenants. Am 39 and married. Try to write, daily—don't always succeed. Knew men in MP's and OSS branches. Result—present yarn in *Adventure*.

JOHN HETHERINGTON, whose "Dingo" appears on page 117, saw longer service in the Middle East area than any other war correspondent.

He landed in the Middle East Battle Zone in February, 1940, with the first troops of the Australian Imperial Force. He covered the first Wavell campaign, the fighting in Greece, Crete, Syria, the 1941-42 campaign in Libya, the retreat to Alamein in June, 1942, and the Alamein Victory in November, 1942, staying with the British Eighth Army until his return to Australia in the spring of 1943.

He is now associated with the *News* as correspondent, in South Australia.

AND George C. Thompson—he was a sergeant in the Quartermaster Corps stationed in Leyte, P.I. at the time he wrote "Snafu on Bogg Island"—hails us from there on the eve of his departure for home as follows—

Born 1919. Spent my first twenty years in and around Detroit, Michigan gathering two years of college credits. The next four were divided between working, acquiring a wife, a daughter and a draft notice. Divided fourteen months overseas between Oahu, Hawaiian Islands and Leyte, Philippine Islands. Didn't see combat. This issue of *Adventure* and I should be coming out about the same time.

Every soldier at one time or another has experienced how demanding or sometimes how complicated supply procedure in the Army can be. Now, there is a very good reason for its being that way. After all when you consider the millions of items available, it is easy to understand why there should be rhyme and reason mixed in. The possibilities of what might happen if the proper procedure were disregarded led to "Bogg Island."

As for the future, I am planning to take at least a few courses under the GI Bill and perhaps go so far as to get a BA degree. Naturally, I'll keep on writing.

WHEN we asked Nard Jones how much of "Comcomly and the King George Woman" was fact, and how much a figment of that fine Jonesian fancy, the author answered—

Comcomly, of course, really lived on the lower Columbia as chief of the Chinooks, and so did Mistress Barnes. Washington Irving speaks of the chief, and so do a number of early traders and explorers in their journals. But they are very reticent about Jane. She was undoubtedly the first white woman on Pacific shores. She did not stay long but she caused plenty of grief while she was there. There is some rather weak evidence that she went from Fort Astoria to Canton. If she did, it's certain that she got herself a wealthy Chinese merchant.

The *Racoon* was there, under Captain Black, and he and his crew were famous ones for grog, all right. And when they got there they found that the fort was already sold out, but they went ahead with the ceremony, just as I put it in the story.

Incidentally—speaking of Grand Coulee Dam (which some folks still persist in believing is in California instead of Washington)—the background of Mr. Jones' current best-selling novel "Still to the West" is the construction project which begot that mighty spillway.

The finish of McTavish, who brought Jane Barnes to Fort George, is interesting. He was crossing the Columbia one stormy day with Alexander Henry (a younger Northwest Company trader whose "Journals" are worth reading) when their boat overturned. Whether the storm caused their death, or whether there was an argument—possibly over Jane—will probably never be known. Today in Astoria, Oregon, there is an ancient headstone for McTavish whose body was washed ashore. The stone is almost hidden by weeds in a vacant lot near the center of Astoria. Few modern residents know it is there, and of those who do not many realize its full story.

However, Astoria does know about the old Fort and—at least in the days before the war—the outlines of its floor plan were painted on the asphalt pavements and the sidewalks and there was a sign-board keying the positions of the various rooms.

John Jacob Astor thought more of the North Pacific trade than he did of the Columbia River possibilities. Consequently, he gave the best trade goods to his *Tonquin* which, like his Astoria venture, was ill-fated and destroyed by an explosion in Nootka Sound. It is believed that savages sneaked aboard and set a fuse to her powder. The *Tonquin* story is much better known than the Fort George story, and I do not believe there are more than two dozen lines about Jane Barnes that I have not written myself. If there are, I would be happy to know about them because the story still interests me. The gentlemen who met Jane, even gentlemen like Alexander Henry who kept contemporary diaries and

journals, seem to have gone inarticulate as far as Jane is concerned.

The North Pacific Coast savages were a queer lot, wholly unlike the plains Indians or the East Coast tribes. For instance, there was a tribe on Vancouver Island which had a culture strange even for North Coasters. In this tribe a man's worth and character were established by the amount of goods he could give away or destroy. He embarrassed his rivals by giving away or destroying more goods than the rival could rid himself of. At one of these potlatches a chief might burn hundreds upon hundreds of blankets, canoes, personal adornments, even houses—and if the rival chief could not destroy more than an equal amount of property he was in disgrace.

Property, therefore, became a strange fetish. A man's whole life was bent from earliest infancy toward the acquisition of property which he might one day destroy in a sudden effort to embarrass a rival. The fact is, the more you read about that Vancouver Island tribe the more familiar the pattern seems to you and you begin to think, "Now where have I run into that before?" But of course we call *their* culture-pattern "crazy" whereas *ours* is civilized.

Throughout history the Columbia River country has had a strange fascination for me, and I know of nobody who has been around it long who does not feel its weird pull. Of course, I may be biased, but I believe that no other stream has had such a great influence on U.S. history—and, oddly, this influence comes right down to the present moment with the Grand Coulee Dam furnishing the power necessary for the Hanford Project which supplied the plutonium for the atomic bomb. Actually, the Columbia turned out to be the famed "Northwest Passage" for which nations searched for years. Lewis and Clark and others proved this a few years after Jane Barnes' brief visit to the lower Columbia.

If Jane had stuck around and raised a family the Northwest Territory might today be under the British flag, for the claim of settlers is always a powerful one. Wives and children, no more and no less, drove out the mountain men and the powerful Hudson's Bay Company and saved the Oregon country for the United States. No question about it, Jane missed her chance in history. But she must have had a hell of a lot of fun!

LETTERS addressed to this department have arrived long overdue for any number of reasons but this is the first time, so far as we know, when a communication has been delayed by the uncertainties of bottle delivery. The following, corked in a gin flask, was posted at sea enroute from Hamburg, Germany to Galveston, Texas. Tossed overboard, according to the writer, "off the coast of Florida close by a fisherman," it took the better part of two months to reach our desk—

Gentlemen:—

Edgar Young goes about spinning his Typical Tropical Tramp piece in the January *Adventure* in a typical TTT manner—even to making his facts fit the story.

Ed Burke did not coin the phrase TTT. He might have formed an organization of TTT's. Anything was possible with that gang. I know, for I have myself built railroads as "Resident Civil Engineer" and knew how to do it when the job was done though at the start I only had a knowledge of math. Time and again I have taught myself how to do trade after trade in order to break in Indians to carry on. So in that part Ed is right. I was only one of many.

But who coined the phrase TTT is unknown. It was in common use at Panama in 1904. I heard it in Nicaragua after the Spanish-American war of 1898. I heard Butch Cassidy and Harry Lingenbough give O. Henry credit for it. Lee Christmas used it steady in Honduras. My grandfather used it when I was a boy. He said he picked it up in Colombia when he made the tropics after Lee's surrender.

I do not believe I have ever met Ed Young but I think our trails crossed about twenty-six years ago. It was either in southern Bolivia or northern Argentine. He was with some ex-Lt. Johnson whom I did meet. They were on a hunt for some lost city which I afterwards found. I was going into the brush as guide for Blondy Kincaid of Standard Oil, came out of the Gran Chaco so full of fever I had to go to Patagonia for cold weather to kill the fever. Worked as C.E. on building the Southern Argentine R.R. south of Rio Negro.

So I know for a fact that TTT was used when my grandfather was young and that ain't yesterday as I am over sixty and Grandpappy has been dead for fifty years. So if Ed Burke coined it he must have been a hundred years old at the building of the Madera-Mamore Railroad. Which by the way was built solely for the purpose of getting out rubber around the rapids. I was there.

I've heard Billy Pittman speak of Ed Young. Billy died in Colon two years ago. The old TTT's are going fast. Billy was Lee Christmas' hand grenade expert. 1¼" sawed-off pipe, leaded with bolts, nuts and cooked nitro-glycerine. Paddy O'Bern, Billy's partner is buried in a niche in La Paz, Bolivia. Bill Brooks is running a hotel in Santiago del Estero, Argentine. Guy Maloney is on the force in New Orleans. Lee Christmas died some years ago peacefully in bed surrounded by his family. Bill Ingersol, Merril's brother of Merril and Harry Tracy notoriety, is running a mule pack train over the Andes from Salta to San Pedro de Atacama. Butch Cassidy and Harry Lingenbough were killed in a tambo by a posse at Tupiza, Argentine. O. Henry's fate is well known. That's about all that I know are left of the old TTT's of around 1900.

I am retiring to my ranch in Texas

soon and going to call it a day. Going home and raise hogs and grandchildren.

Yours truly,
Comdr. Jack Hart, USMS
Chief Engr. S.S. *Trevilian*
c/o Postmaster, N.Y.

P.S. Maybe Ed remembers the old one-eyed Mick with the one glass eye? The brother who used to take out his eye and lay it on a rock to watch the Indian changadoreos cut out high grade "rosi clare" while he went to the pulperia to drink "chicha de Maiz"? Well that old brother must be crowding ninety. He is alive and well. Saw him not so long ago at the Panama Hotel in Antofogasta, Chile.

At Slallogua, Bolivia, I saw the Mick lay his eye on a rock and tell the Indians that the eye would see them if they loafed on the job while he was gone. As soon as he was out of sight one Indian laid his hat over the glass eye. Then they all sat down to chew cocaine leaves or, as they say, *kokeahr*.

We forwarded the above along to Edgar Young—not by bottle-post!—and promptly received a copy of his reply to his fellow TTT. Here's Ed's answer—

Dear Jack Hart:

That fisherman apparently did retrieve the letter you tossed overboard off the Florida coast and it arrived on K.S.W.'s desk O.K. and he has passed it along to me for comment.

I'm glad you say I spin a yarn in the TTT manner. I learned how to spin them in *cantinas*, when hanging about the quarters of some job I happened to be working, and when hitting trail with others of the clan. I realize, too, that you are an actual TTT.

As I said in the article, I became an *ex post facto* charter-member of the organization formed by Ed Burke, and I just have hear-say to go on about the alliterative title TYPICAL TROPICAL TRAMPS having been originated at the time by him. I later met many, if not all, of those who had been present at the Zacapa meeting, and I remember distinctly asking Bronky Smith if Ed originated the expression, and he told me that Ed did. It may be possible that Ed had originated it before the meeting, and it could have been years before. It's been about forty years ago when the meeting was held and Ed was no spring-chicken at the time. He was mentally alert but his hair was gray and he had easily been roaming the tropics for twenty-five years, and perhaps longer when I first met him. I would say on a guess that he was about your present age when he passed through the Canal Zone from Panama to Colon, stopping at the various camps and making touches to help him raise the fare to the Madera-Mamore job in Brazil. I first knew him in Mexico before the meeting was held in Zapaca, Guatemala, and he was back at Zapaca when I hit Guatemala later. He then went down to Costa Rica and worked a hitch as dispatcher, and I was working as steam engineer on the Zone at Gatun when he came through. He had a fellow with him who had come from Costa Rica and who went on with him to the Amazon job.

I think the time element precludes the possibility of the expression having been invented by O. Henry. O. Henry had held a state or government job at Austin, Texas, and he had left to come to Houston to run a column for the *Houston Post*. A discrepancy was found in the accounts and when they began bearing down on him, the owner of the paper told him he would go broke fighting the case but O. Henry (William Porter) was actually guilty and he took off. Years later he came back to take his medicine and was sent to Columbus, Ohio stir to do time, and it was while he was there that he was re-discovered by Bobby Davis, editor of *Argosy*, and given a boost toward immortal fame. I would say on a chance that O. Henry ducked from Houston about 1899 for I was working there about 1906 and as a steady reader of the *Post* I saw reference made to his literary ability and column in the paper now and then. At the time the *Houston Post* was one of the best newspapers in the U. S. and it may be now, but I haven't seen a copy of it for forty years or so.

If your grandfather did not immediately go to Colombia after the Civil War, but waited eight or ten years for instance, Ed Burke as a boy might have already been there. I think Ed was born in Ireland and kids over there used to take to the sea when quite young. I remember Ed telling me at length about his experiences in Colombia and one incident stands out in my mind. He had acquired in some manner a very fine American saddle horse, bridle, saddle, and equipment; and he sold the outfit for the equivalent of $1,500 U. S. money. At the time the native pesos were just worth 1¢ and they still were when I hit Colombia. Ed told me he had to sell the horse because he had no use for it, and then said: "I had to buy a damn burro to pack my money on to Panama." This may have been true, but it also could have been one of Ed's improvisations.

I don't think there is any disputing the fact that Ed loosely organized the TTT's. The expression carried a sort of slur with it when used by those who were not TTT's, and Ed did a great deal to make it a term of praise. I feel proud that I am a TTT and I know you do too.

I've heard of all the individuals mentioned in your letter and I've met one or two of them. I was body-guard for Lee Christmas in Guatemala and I know all details about him. I am inclined to question your statement that Lee died peacefully in bed, surrounded by his family.

Lee was twenty-one when he became en-

(Continued on page 144)

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FROM THE SUN-PARCHED WASTES OF THE ETHIOPIAN DESERTS WHERE SAVAGE DANAKIL TRIBESMEN LURK, READY TO RAID THE CAMEL CARAVANS SMUGGLING ARMS FROM THE SOMALI COAST—TO THE TEXAS DECK OF A NATCHEZ CLIPPER ROARING DOWN OLD MAN RIVER NEW ORLEANS BOUND—AND HALF AROUND THE WORLD AGAIN TO HILO WITH A DECK CARGO OF FIGHTING COCKS FOR THE T. H. SPORTING GENTRY—THEN BACK TO THE AMERICAN WEST TO FOLLOW A TRAIL-DRIVEN HERD OF LONGHORNS ON THE WEARY TREK FROM THE BRAZOS TO FORT DODGE—IT'S A LONG AND WINDING ADVENTURE TRAIL WE TAKE NEXT MONTH WITH A NEW THRILL AROUND EVERY BEND IN THE ROAD!

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Can anyone tell me the present whereabouts of Didier Mason, who dropped the first bombs in warfare, in the Mexican revolution, about 1912? He was in Belize after 1919, and then New Orleans. Edward F. Hinkle, c/o ADVENTURE.

Anyone knowing the address at the present time or in recent years of Frank Lester Gunter, please write Robert E. Mahaffey, Box 818, Oklahoma City. He was discharged from the Army in 1931. He was born July 29, 1903 or 1907, has lived in Dardanelle and Clinton, Arkansas; Wardin and Blackwell, Oklahoma; St. Louis; Granite City, Illinois. His father, T. C. Gunter, lived in St. Cloud, Florida, and Clinton, Arkansas.

Information and address wanted of my brother, Lewis Edward Kiger, born in 1904 at Badger, Kansas. He is about 5 feet 5 inches, has blue eyes, dark red hair. Last heard of in 1923 at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and was a member of Battery A, 15th Field Artillery, ASN 6 211 468. He lived at Clearwater and Sawyer, Kansas; Webb City, Alba, and other towns in Missouri. He had the nickname of Buck. Please write Earl Kiger, c/o Andrew Taylor, 200 Kerr-McGee Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

I would like to find Herbert A. Roig, forty-five years old, 5 feet 10 inches tall, weight around 150 pounds. He has gray eyes and brown hair. He was last heard of in Texas in 1940. Please send any information to Frank Landon, 1146 Webster Street, San Francisco 15, California.

I would like to locate my son, Willis Hilliard, born in 1898 in Denton County, Texas. He is 5 feet 11 inches, weighs around 160 pounds, has brown hair and brown eyes and a dark complexion. He joined the Navy in 1916 and was on the USS Pennsylvania and Maumee. He was in submarines for a time on convoy and had his ears badly injured. T. Y. Hilliard, 513 South 26th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Ernest O'Breeden, 1700 Eva Street, Austin 22, Texas, would like to hear from Larry O'Reilly, believed to have left Los Angeles, California, for somewhere in Illinois.

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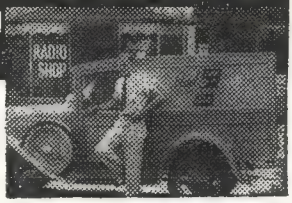

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(Continued from page 141)

gineer on the L. N.O. and T. RR and because he was color blind he ran a red light and crashed into another train head-on. He and his fireman escaped injury but a member of the other crew was killed. Louisiana was still using the Napoleonic Code and Lee was put in Baton Rouge jail to await trial for murder. The railroaders came, blew a hole in the jail with dynamite, but it was too small for Lee to crawl through; so they tossed in a rope and hauled him out. He told me he stretched like rubber during the process.

Lee ran off from home at 15 to go steamboating on Lake Pontchartrain, and had worked as brakeman, fireman, baggageman, and construction foreman, before becoming a hogger. He told me he was born Feb. 22, 1863, and it was about 1885 when he was rescued from jail and took off for Honduras. I believe he did tell me he had a wife in the States, but he had just left his legal wife in Guatemala before I began gunslicking for him. The National Encyclopedia of American Biography, page 380, volume 4, in an account of his life has this sentence: *He was said to have married seven times.*

I believe you will find that he died in the City Hospital at New Orleans on January 21, 1924. He had come up from Puerto Cortez, Honduras, to undergo treatment for tropical anemia and complications. Big Jim Brown came up to donate blood for transfusions but Lee got steadily worse and died. You can get the details by checking the "morgue" of any New Orleans newspaper. I'm not saying that he didn't have a family here who came to see him for I once had a letter from a lad in the marines who called himself Young Lee Christmas. But if those other six families had been there it would really have been a reunion!

Anyhow, I'm not arguing with you, just shooting the bull about like I would if we met up and hoisted a few with one foot on the rail and the bartender shoving them across to us steadily. I really know some good ones that are not printable.

Maybeso we can dig up some more TTT's. Sammy Shields down in San Antonio, Texas, *quit* the ORT in 1895 to become a dispatcher and he's just up from dispatching on a banana pike. I know another old head out in California. Some of them may be able to throw additional light on the origin of the title, TTT, we go by. I happen to be a stickler for facts, too, and any word from one of the clan will make good reading.

Yours most cordially,
Edgar Young

Good reading indeed! Every last word of it—pro and con. And we'd appreciate a line from any of you other TTT's who've a yen to reminisce—as would Brothers Young and Hart. How's about keeping each other posted—via *Camp-Fire*?—K.S.W.

(Continued from page 39)

sergeant and, together with Staff Sergeant Gillycuddy, will proceed without delay by first available military aircraft to general headquarters to perform top secret mission."

"Stinky, so help me . . ."

"Oh well," he says, going through the motions of snapping out of it. "That's life. What I really dropped by for was to tell you that the boys are having a little party for me. I want you to come."

"Why sure, old man," I say. "Sure. I'll be there."

IT'S quite a gala do the boys are whipping up for Stinky I find when I go down to the Special Services hut that night. The mess halls for miles around have been robbed for G.I. hors d'oeuvres, consisting mostly of pickles, dog biscuits, and tinned cheese. Also there is a little canned grapefruit juice and quite a lot of corn whiskey to cut it with. I brush aside all temptations and settle down to devotion to the colorless, odoriferous, pungent fire in the jugs. Then there is a poker game. . . .

I wake up next morning with the sun pouring in through the top of my head which someone has left open. I reach up to close it, but it doesn't help. Where am I? One open eye reveals the familiar clutter of my own quarters and the two bags I have packed for my move to the 28th Depot. Fortunately, I am still fully clothed. I stagger outside to splash water on my wincing face and then continue my wavering progress over to the mess hall.

A couple of scalding gulps of coffee brings things back into focus. I stand, leaning against the bread cabinet and feeling a bit sad as I realize that Stinky is by now winging his way north to Japan. I sigh and reach in my pocket for my cigarette lighter. I pull out a folded sheet of paper and idly glance at it before casting it from me. The funny stuff a fellow keeps . . . I open it.

"'For receipt of two thousand pesos . . .'" I read with popping eyes. "OH NO!"

"What the hell's eating you?" the mess sergeant wants to know coldly. "Don't go and get sick in here."

"I— I—" Words won't come easily. "That lowdown, conniving, hyphenated, two-headed worm. That—" Words are flowing now. "That maggot-infested louse."

"Mad at somebody?"

"Stinky! That snake in my bosom. He got me drunk, lured me into a poker game, and then he sold *me* that nightclub."

THE END

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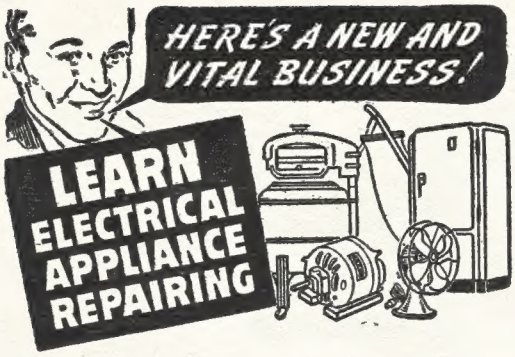

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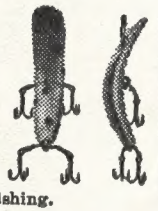

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(Continued from page 57)

She is not a queen for a great people like the Chinooks."

Comcomly considered my argument carefully. When he had had another touch of spirits he considered it once again, and it seemed good to him. We marched out of the bastion and I told McDougall what the old man was going to do. There was trouble getting Black to order his marines to cease firing, but we managed it at last. And the moment old Comcomly showed his wrinkled head, the Chinooks calmed down. He talked to them a long time in his native tongue. I do not know what he said, exactly, but I knew that the Chinooks stopped fighting.

Black and the two Scots and I were standing on the bastion listening to the old faker when the captain suddenly clutched at my arm. "The devil's teeth!" he rasped out. *"Look there!"* With my eyes I followed his trembling finger. The *Racoon* had all sail set and was heading toward the bar! Captain Black unlimbered his glass and leveled it, and then he swore volubly in the language of all seven seas. I took the glass from his hand, and quickly made out at the taffrail of the *Racoon* the figure of a woman.

In the excitement of the attack, we had completely forgotten Jane. I assumed that McDougall had carried her to one of the *Todd's* boats. McDougall assumed that McTavish had dragged her back inside his quarters. The fact was that neither had touched her since the moment Little Necklace had unbuttoned Hades.

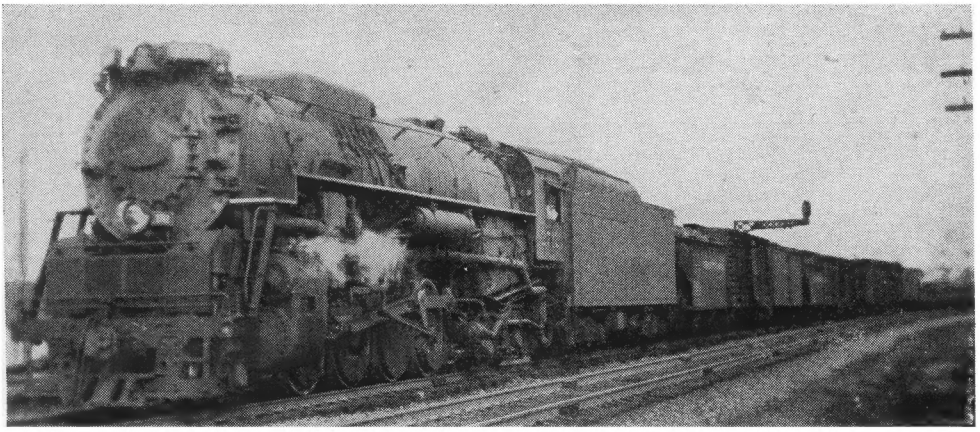
"It's that double damned lieutenant!" shouted Black furiously. "The one with the scar on his nose. I had trouble with him in the islands. I've had trouble with him wherever there's a likely wench. And now, by God, he's pirated a British sloop of war!"

Donald McTavish stirred. "Never mind, Captain. He'll pay well for his reckless folly if he's got Jane aboard."

Captain Black was not soothed. "Damn me, I remember seeing him carrying her down to the beach, but I supposed he was taking her to one of the *Todd's* boats where she belonged." He turned to us, his flushed face a study. "By the bellybutton of Neptune! Come to think of it now, I believe the wench had her eyes open."

He slumped down against the bastion and put his face in his hands. But just imagine yourself in his place, sir. It *was* a damned difficult thing to try to explain to the Admiralty.

Matter of fact, I hear that Black never tried to explain it to the Admiralty. I hear he stayed out there on the lower Columbia and that Comcomly made him Commodore of the Chinook fleet—two hundred and ten dugout canoes and every one of them with an animal carved on the prow.



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